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INTERNATIONAL

FEDERATION FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Gerald Nagler

To: All foreign participants of the Prague seminar
From: Gerald Nagler
Date: 1 December 1988

Dear friends,

Please find enclosed my memo and other material related to the Prague seminar. Once more I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for all you did for the seminar. Our trip to Prague was very important and I appreciate very much having had the privilege to get to know you all.

The seminar goes on. I have assured Vaclav Havel that we are all at his disposal in sending speakers or coming ourselves if needed. Please stay in contact with us and among yourselves.

Happy holiday and all the best!

PS. Many apologies for writing such a short note. I am just leaving on a long trip.

ENCL:

Memo by Gerald Nagler
Article by Timothy Garton Ash
Article by Abbe Pierre Toulat
Press release of the Czech Embassy in Bonn
Article of Rude Pravo
Protest from the Vienna seminar
Article of Neue Züricher Zeitung
Speech of Ambassador Zimmermann
List of the participants of the Prague seminar

NATIONAL COMMITTEES

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David Matas
Canadian Helsinki Committee
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Annemarie Renger
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Federal Republic of Germany
Peter Baehr
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Lord Eric Avebury
Helsinki Subcommittee of the
Parliamentary Human Rights Group
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CZECHOSLOVAKIA 1988

This seminar prepared by Charta 77 and four other independent organizations in the CSSR was intended to commemorate the historical events 1918 - 38 - 48 - 68. The authorities had been informed in detail already in September -- which resulted in home searches and intimidation.

As a seminar like this is in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Helsinki Final Act, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights decided to send an international delegation to participate. We informed the CSSR authorities and even requested a meeting with the CSSR Ambassador to explain our attitude to avoid misunderstanding. In the IHF delegation were, amongst others, Max van der Stoep, Lord Erik Avebury and Gerald Nagler. Some of the members of our delegation were denied visas: Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, publisher of "Die Zeit", Ove Nathan, Professor and Dean of Copenhagen University and others. Some were given visas but warned and intimidated. On arrival in Prague, our delegation found our hosts arrested and ourselves under "police protection."

The seminar -- opened dramatically by Vaclav Havel seconds before he himself was arrested -- could not take place as planned. We, the members of the foreign delegation, were warned in a very rude way by pieces of paper handed out to us stating in four languages:

Advertisement ("Achtung")

"I am warning you that the action called Symposium CZECHOSLOVAKIA 88 is illegal and its performance would be contrary to the interests of Czechoslovak working people and consequently illegal. In this connection your efforts to take part in this action would be considered as a manifestation of hostility to Czechoslovakia and in virtue of this we should have to draw relevant consequences against your person."

This warning was not signed!? Who is "I" -- the police, the state? However, insisting on the full legality of our action, we of course pursued. We tried to continue in private flats with those who were not arrested, but the police stopped even this. The seminar instead of being, as planned, an academic meeting turned into a symbolic meeting.

B/cz88/1

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**INTERNATIONAL
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The IHF delegation conducted a modest commemorative ceremony and laid flowers on the grave of Jan Patočka -- while being surrounded by secret police. The delegation presented a protest to the Central Committee addressed to Mr. Jakes and went to the Police Headquarters to request clarification as to why our hosts had been arrested, what charges had been brought against them, why they were detained more than 48 hours, which is contrary to CSSR law, and if they had access to legal assistance. None of the requests and questions were answered. We also visited the wives of many of the men under arrest; they themselves were often under house arrest.

In short, the human rights situation in the CSSR is appalling. Meanwhile, since many persons living in the West who would have liked to participate in Prague could not obtain CSSR visas, the IHF organized a parallel seminar "CSSR 1988" in Vienna, moderated by the IHF Chairman Karl von Schwarzenberg. Participants were, amongst others, Jiri Pelikan, Zdenek Mlynar, Pavel Kohout, Pavel Tigrid, and Frantisek Janouch. The speeches which were planned to be held in Prague had, ironically enough to be read by others in Vienna.

The seminar in Prague was opened by Vaclav Havel, seconds before policemen arrested him. Our CSSR hosts as well as we consider the seminar as still on-going. The IHF will in every possible way continue to assist our CSSR friends to give them the possibility of intellectual and academic impulses. We consider this to be totally in agreement with the Helsinki Accords.

The IHF and the delegation which was in Prague has already protested against the treatment of our hosts and other human rights violations in the CSSR. We also strongly protest against statements like the enclosed press release from the CSSR Embassy in Bonn.

On Friday November 11, 1988, the foundation of the Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee was announced. Was it symptomatic that on that day the chairman of this committee, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Jiri Hajek, and most of the other signatories such as Vaclav Havel were in police detention? That the members of other Helsinki Human Rights Committees, such as Max van der Stoep and Lord Erik Avebury, chairmen of the Dutch and British Helsinki Committees and Gerald Nagler, Secretary General of the International Helsinki Federation were in Prague, but hindered from meeting members of the new Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee?

INTERNATIONAL

FEDERATION FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS

This new independent Czechoslovak committee consisting of internationally respected persons will hopefully be allowed to work without intimidation, house searches, arrests and discrimination. This would improve the very damaged image in respect to human rights of Czechoslovakia.

Gerald Nagler, Secretary General
Vienna, November 30, 1988

enclosures:- Rude Pravo article
 press release by the Czechoslovak Embassy in Bonn
 - resolution adopted by parallel seminar in Vienna
 - Speculator article
 - N22 article

Rude pravo, 14 November 1988

ATTEMPT AT A PROVOCATION

A fortnight after the provocative action by anti-socialist forced the same group of people now attempted to stage another form of provocation. They had the cooperation of organisations for psychological warfare of the NATO countries. Western broadcasting stations also took an active part. What was it all about?

Last weekend the so-called Charter 77 intended to hold a symposium in Prague under the title "Czechoslovakia 88". According to the foreign press, some twenty persons representing various official and unofficial structures in the West, were to arrive here under the cloak of tourism; many of these persons are acting from extreme anti-Czechoslovak positions.

The interest of these so-called tourists did not focus on cultural sites in our capital, but on inciting so-called dissidents to even more intensive anti-socialist activity. Their intentions backfired. With the use of material, prepared in advance, they intended to discredit our social system and vilify our countries in the neighbouring countries. According to the foreign press, this material, frequently glorifying the political structures before 1938, is said to describe our past historical developments from subjectivist positions and even full of contradictions. Several of the organisers have been detained.

A similar event with the same political objectives was organised in Vienna last Sunday by emigre and other centres. Both these actions had one and the same purpose: to cast doubt not only on the endeavour of our Party and society towards restructuring, but to complicate the negotiations of the Vienna meeting, and, in contradiction with the Final Act of the Conference on European Security and Cooperation, to interfere in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia and violate Czechoslovakia's sovereignty.

Vaclav Dolezal

c/ Rude pravo

Bonn, den 17. 11. 1988

P r e s s R e l e a s e

Weitere_Provokation_in_Prag

Es ist nicht so lange her, seit die antisozialistischen politischen Strukturen in der Tschechoslowakei am Staatsfeiertag - dem Gründungstag unserer Republik (28. Oktober) - Unruhe und Unfrieden zu stiften versuchten, die einen Eingriff von Ordnungskräften erforderlich machten. An diesem Wochenende liessen ihre Anführer, mit dem Repräsentanten der "Charta 77" Václav Havel an der Spitze, erneut von sich hören. Sie beriefen das sog. Seminar "Tschechoslowakei 88" nach Prag ein und vergassen dabei nicht viele ihrer politischen Seelenverwandten aus Westeuropa dazu einzuladen.

Internationalen Anspruch sollte diesem Seminar eine zum gleichen Zeitpunkt im benachbarten Wien stattfindende Versammlung verleihen. Dieser durchaus nicht zufällig zusammengerufenen Gesellschaft ging es keineswegs um unschuldige Meditationen über Geschichte und Gegenwart, sondern - wie schliesslich schon mehrmals - um eine Einschätzung der Möglichkeit, inwieweit es die im Lande verlaufenden politischen und gesellschaftlichen Prozesse gestatten würden, die politische Opposition weiter radikal zu gestalten, um diese dann schliesslich auch zum Hervorrufen von Chaos und Anarchie zu legalisieren. Und es ist kein Geheimnis, dass bei ähnlichen trauten Zusammenkünften zwischen eigenen und fremden Exponenten das taktische Vorgehen abgesprochen wird.

Dazu ist festzustellen, dass diejenigen, die diesmal in Prag auftauchen, genügend Erfahrung darin besitzen, um mit der

Schlussakte von Helsinki - die sie selbst in flagranter Weise verletzen - winkend, mit ihrem giftigen Speichel einen souveränen Staat und seine Gesellschaftsordnung zu besudeln.

Eben in der Schlussakte wird angeführt, dass die Unterzeichnerstaaten die "souvärene Gleichberechtigung und Individualität... zu denen auch das Recht eines jeden Staates auf rechtliche Gleichberechtigung, territoriale Integrität, auf Freiheit und politische Unabhängigkeit achten werden. Sie werden auch gegenseitig ihr Recht respektieren, sich ihr politisches, gesellschaftliches, wirtschaftliches und kulturelles System frei zu wählen, sowie auch ihr Recht, eigene Gesetze und Vorschriften zu bestimmen."

(vgl. K S Z E - Schlussakte, Teil 1,a/Kap.1.)

Kein vernünftiger Mensch ist in einem Land mit geordneten Verhältnissen daran interessiert auf die Ratschläge derjenigen zu hören, die, obwohl mit akademischen Titeln behangen und des diplomatischen Alphabets mächtig, nicht zu begreifen vermögen, dass sie Gäste eines Landes sind, das sich im Geiste des vorstehend genannten Dokumentes eigene Gesetze und eine eigene Rechtsordnung festgelegt hat und dass diese Gesetze für jedermann gelten.

Und so stellt sich beim Schreiben dieser Zeilen unwillkürlich die Frage: Geht es in dieser so ungewöhnlich gut synchronisierten Kampagne einer Handvoll in- und ausländischer Leutchen doppelter Moral um eine rein tschechoslowakische Angelegenheit?

We, the participants of the Vienna meeting organised in parallel with the Prague symposium "Czechoslovakia 1988"

EXPRESS

our support to those who in Czechoslovakia attempt to carry out a free and open discussion of their country's past and present;

PROTEST

against the violent police action against a peaceful historical seminar which was to be held in the Czechoslovak capital and in connection with which dozens of Czech and Slovak citizens were arrested, some of them still being held in jail;

ACCUSE THE CZECHOSLOVAK AUTHORITIES

of flagrant violations of the Helsinki Final Act and other international agreements duly signed by the Prague government;

STATE

that at a time when in some other Soviet bloc countries human and civil rights are enlarged, in Czechoslovakia, on the contrary, repression and police terror reign, resembling some of the worst periods of blind persecution;

REQUEST

that the Czechoslovak authorities immediately release all those who wanted to attend the Prague symposium and were arrested, as well as the other political prisoners, and apologize publicly for the unheard-of police action in Prague;

ASK

the Austrian representatives at the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe to submit on our behalf this protest to the Czechoslovak delegation to the Vienna Follow-up Conference.

BLACK COMEDY IN PRAGUE

Timothy Garton Ash runs up against the Czechoslovak secret police, who are trying to turn back the tide of history in Eastern Europe

Prague
A LADY with a red flower would meet us at breakfast, we were told. She would lead us to the meeting place. So there we sat in the faded Jugendstil splendour of the Hotel Pariz, a score of academics, writers, human rights activists, and parliamentarians from Western Europe and the United States, waiting for our mysterious guide. Most of our Czechoslovak hosts for this independent symposium 'Czechoslovakia 88' had been arrested the day before. Prominent Western guests had been refused visas by the Czechoslovak authorities on the grounds that the planned meeting was 'illegal' — although by what law they could not say. The streets around the Pariz were full of uniformed and secret police. It looked bad.

Then through the door swept not a lady with a red flower, but the playwright Vaclav Havel, the symbolic leader of the democratic opposition in Czechoslovakia and chairman of the symposium. He walked quickly to our table, sat down and formally declared the meeting open. Within seconds, three plain clothes men were behind him. 'Well, in this moment I am arrested,' said Havel. But before they hurried him away he managed to repeat that he had declared the symposium open.

Sally Laird of *Index on Censorship*, photographed the scene. More secret police moved in to confiscate her film. As we argued with them, we noticed a massive woman in a black leather jacket carrying out just one but a whole bouquet of flowers. She moved over to us and thrust into our hands, not the flowers but envelopes, inside which we found the most extraordinary poison-pen letter it has ever been my privilege to receive. Typed, photocopied, unsigned, in English, German, French and Italian, it read as follows:

Advertisement

I am warning you that the action called Symposium Czechoslovakia 88 is illegal and its performance would be contrary to the interests of Czechoslovak working people and consequently illegal. In this connection your efforts to take part in this action would be considered as a manifestation of hostility

to Czechoslovakia and in virtue of this we should have to draw relevant consequences against your person.

But who was the Kafkaesque 'I'? Someone asked the lady with the bouquet to identify herself. She said she 'ensured order in the hotel'. In subsequent conversation we tentatively identified her as a secret police officer who had guarded the Havel family flat, presenting herself as one



'Lieutenant Novotna', which is to say (roughly) Lieutenant Smith. Briefly detained in a police car the next day, three of us were again handed this fantastical 'Advertisement' (the German version was headed '*Achtung*') by another plain clothes policeman. We asked him whence it came. From the City Council of Prague, he said at first. But who was this 'I'? we insisted. He pointed to himself, adding helpfully, as if we might not realise: 'Police!'

What we were doing by this time was to go round in smaller groups visiting such few of the Czech symposium participants as were still at home — usually under house arrest, and the families of those in

prison. Before this we had attempted to reconvene the meeting in a private flat but police in front of the door had simply prevented any of our Czech friends getting in. We had shot off a *démarche* to the Czechoslovak government at the CSO ('Helsinki') review conference in Vienna. We had briefed our ambassadors. We had laid flowers on the grave of the philosopher and founding father of Charter 77, Jan Patoch, a moving ceremony filmed by an independent video team. We had marched up to the Central Committee building and delivered a letter of protest addressed to the party leader Milos Jakes. A rather clever-looking official at the door assured us — in fluent Russian — that he would pass the letter on to 'Comrade Jakes, but regretted that there was no one to receive us on a Saturday. And who was he? What was his name and position? 'I just work here,' he explained shortly, *glasnost* glinting from his glasses. We had marched down to the main secret police office in the Old Town, demanding to know why and where our hosts were imprisoned. Once again the officer at the door explained that no one was working there at the weekend, a contention somewhat undermined by a succession of men in plain clothes pushing through our group to enter the building.

Now, as we paid our individual visits, I was interested to observe the surveillance techniques of the secret police. Their sheer number must make a major contribution to that full employment which is one of the great advantages of socialism. Perhaps naïvely, I had not realised before how they use nicely dressed young couples, boy and girl walking arm and arm. And then I was glad to note that they, at least, have no shortage of hard currency, since three of us alone had the attention of at least two foreign cars, a blue Ford Sierra and a snazzy little red Fiat. Spying the latter after one of our calls, and feeling rather tired and hungry, we decided to ask our marks for a lift back to our hotel. As we walked towards them, the driver started the engine and then pulled slowly away.

Amusing for us — but no joke at all for our Czech friends sitting in prison. In

theory the Czechoslovak authorities' handling of the symposium was tactically refined. Earlier this year they got themselves a terrible press by breaking up a peace seminar and expelling the foreign participants — including a certain Hitchens, C., late of this journal. Now they would allow our group, which included such eminent persons as Lord Avebury of the British parliamentary human rights group and a former Dutch foreign minister, to stay on, but lock up all the Czechs for 48 hours, and in some cases, immediately again for part of a further 48 hours, abandoning all but the barest shreds of legality. We, meanwhile, would be allowed to go where we pleased. We would have what the Germans call *Narrenfreiheit*, 'jester's freedom'. All doors would be opened to us, and the police would usher us courteously into empty rooms. Better still, we would bring suffering to the innocent. For if we were foolish enough to visit anyone not already well known to the police these people would surely feel the 'consequences' with which we were merely threatened. In practice, this exercise in damage-limitation did not go quite as planned: because of Havel's marvellous coup de théâtre and the black comedy of Lieutenant Novotna with her flowers and her 'advertisements', because we made our own protest dramatically, *urbi et orbi*, and particularly because West German television managed to film Havel's arrest, and to get the film out. As I write, it seems certain that the Czechoslovak government is in for another international roasting.

What does this little tragi-comedy tell us about Czechoslovakia in 1988? It tells us, obviously, that the present Czechoslovak régime is still going backwards where Hungary, Poland, and, most important, the Soviet Union are going forwards, although not uniformly. Indeed, after the removal of Mr Strougal last month, the present government looks more reactionary than ever. As one Czech historian

remarked to me between interrogations — this is now the government that Brezhnev dreamed of after the invasion 20 years ago. But it is a Brezhnevite government without Brezhnev: a régime whose time has gone.

For this episode also tells us that the régime which has imposed the grotesque abnormality of 'normalisation' in Czechoslovakia for two decades is now profoundly unsettled, confused and hivering. It is unsettled from the East, for if Gorbachev is behaving like Dubcek, and Poland and Hungary almost like free countries, then how on earth do they justify their continued immobility? By reference to the great socialist model of the German Democratic Republic? Or perhaps to Bulgaria?

It is unsettled from the West, by the permanent example of West European prosperity and freedom, by the importance which most Western governments now attach to human rights and internal political conditions in their conduct of the new détente, by the Vienna review conference and the ability of human rights activists such as those grouped in the international Helsinki Federation to mobilise public opinion on these issues.

Last, but by no means least, this régime is deeply unsettled from below — by the new flowering of independent initiative and civil courage within their own country. It now faces opposition and protest not merely from the front line of Charter 77, not only from intellectual samizdat, but from thousands of young people who have found the courage to speak out, and the no less than 600,000 people who have now signed a petition for religious freedom. On the 20th anniversary of the Soviet invasion thousands of mostly young people demonstrated in the centre of Prague, chanting 'Dubcek!' and 'Freedom!' Last month, in a slightly pathetic attempt to gain some patriotic credibility, the authorities suddenly declared that the 70th anniversary of

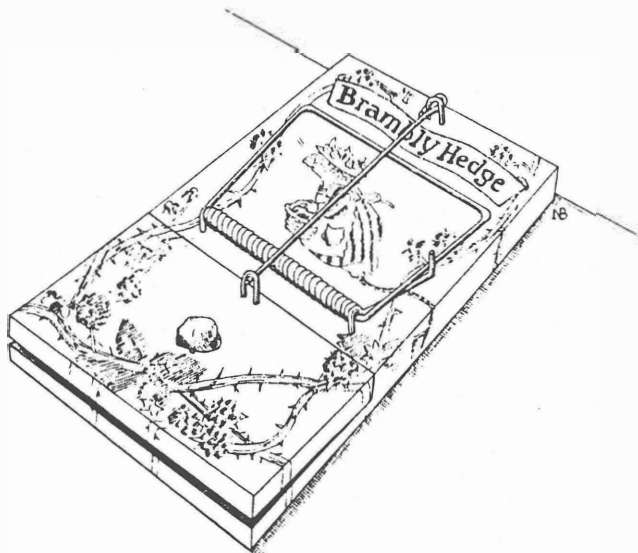
Czechoslovakia's independence on 28 October 1988 be celebrated as a national holiday. (Canny shopkeepers hedged their bets by putting in their windows the slogan 'Long live October!' which could refer either to Russia's revolution in 1917 or to Czechoslovakia's independence in 1918.) Then they locked up all the front-line oppositionists, to ensure that they would not face a genuinely patriotic manifestation. Yet that is exactly what they did face, with a largely spontaneous crowd, again mainly composed of young people, and again chanting 'Freedom!' while being pursued through the narrow streets.

The police round-ups of oppositionists in connection with 28 October, and again in connection with this symposium, are the worst for years. Augustin Navratil, the prime mover of the petition for religious freedom (see 'The yeoman and the cardinal' in *The Spectator*, 16 April 1988) has been confined indefinitely to a mental hospital with a diagnosis of 'paranoia querulens' — and this at a time when even the Soviet Union is desisting from the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes. On the other hand, there are half-hearted gestures of reform and relaxation — for example, allowing devastatingly frank accounts of the country's economic stagnation to appear in the official press. As Tocqueville taught us long ago, such inconsistency is characteristic of an *ancien régime* in its last years.

How long this twilight period will last, and how the change will come about, whether fast or slowly, peacefully or less so — these are, of course, unanswerable questions. The answers will depend primarily on developments inside Czechoslovakia, elsewhere in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. But they will also depend on us. 'The world sees you,' the crowd chanted to the police during the 28 October demonstration. But does it really?

In 1988, as at all those turning-points which were to have been the subject of our symposium — 1918, when Britain, France and the United States effectively gave Tomas Garrigue Masaryk the international licence to create an independent Czechoslovak state; 1938, when, at Munich, Britain and France sold that independent state down the river; 1948, with the communist coup, and 1968, with the Soviet invasion — in this 'year of eight' as in all those historic 'years of eight', the fate of this small country in the centre of Europe still crucially depends on the attitude of the Western as well as the Eastern world.

Now the current line being peddled to the West by the Jakes régime goes roughly like this. 'We really want to press ahead with our own *perestroika*, with economic restructuring above all. But for this we need order and stability at home. *Ordnung muss sein*. Therefore you must give us credits and technology while understanding why we have to lock up dangerous criminal elements'... such as Czecho-



slovakia's greatest living playwright Vaclav Havel. A pretty feeble line, you might think, yet incredibly enough there are signs that some Western powers might half swallow it. This applies above all to West Germany and Austria, both of which have a particular interest in keeping *Ordnung* in Czechoslovakia so that the Czechs don't upset the further progress of their own particular national convergences with East Germany and Hungary respectively. More surprising is the case of France, whose foreign minister earlier this year made the extraordinary statement that Czechoslovakia's human rights performance was improving (an assertion he subsequently modified), and whose President, François Mitterrand, has chosen this of all places, and this of all times, to pay a state visit — scheduled for early next month.

One might understand his reluctance to follow in Mrs Thatcher's wake to Poland or Hungary but this is taking competition a little too far. To offer political recognition and economic support to the present régime in Czechoslovakia is not just morally abhorrent, it is also politically shortsighted. It ignores a prime lesson of recent East European history: the longer that fundamental reform is delayed, the more difficult it becomes, and the less likely it is to occur peacefully. Such an approach is thus likely to achieve the opposite of the desired effect. There is a time to praise, and a time to scold; a time to finance, and a time to refrain from financing. This is the latter.

In the short term, the prospects here look bleak: above all for the young, the faithful, the courageous and the independent. But not in the longer term. If there is such a thing as the tide of history, then in Central Europe today that tide is flowing Westward. And even if he puts our letter of protest straight into his personal shredder, Comrade Jakes can no more halt the tide than old King Canute. There is thus a more than even chance that in the 1990s the Czechs and Slovaks will begin to enjoy some of the greater freedoms and opportunities that are already being enjoyed by their Hungarian and Polish neighbours — and perhaps even, just conceivably, with slightly less of the accompanying economic distress.

And what, in that case, would they do with the likes of Lieutenant Novotna, or whatever she is really called? Looking at her muscular physique some of the intellectuals who were sent down the mines in the 1950s might nurse a bitter momentary thought. But the Czechs are the most gentle and tolerant of all Central European peoples, so I have a better idea, inspired by her remarkable performance in the Hotel Pariz. I think she should go to work in the theatre. In a theatre which stages Vaclav Havel's plays. Indeed, she could perform in one of Havel's plays. I even have a title for it: *Advertisement*. She could play herself.

BURMESE MALAISE

John Ralston Saul sees no reason to suppose democracy will triumph over misgovernment

IT IS hard to have a revolution when you haven't got a country. And Burma hasn't been what you could call a nation, state or country since 1947. Even then it was more a theory than a fact and lasted only a few months.

The flood of enthusiasm that rolled through the Western press, when the Burmese took to the streets this year, seemed to be based more on some international theory of the return of democracy to dictatorship than upon any realistic look at Burma itself. And so the *Observer* was certain that the government 'had been humbled by mass street demonstrations. . . . It is clearly the end of the road for this bizarre dictatorship.' In Paris, *Libération* also announced 'the end of the road' and *Figaro* 'le coup de grace au Ne Win'. And even after the army came out of their barracks and emptied the streets by shooting to kill, the *New York Times* persisted with their theory of how generals fall: 'In the public mind, political legitimacy appears to have shifted from a tiny élite to the broad masses who took part in the uprising. . . . A hated government in retreat will need to become politically sophisticated if they are to survive.'

The *New York Times* must have arrived late in Rangoon the next morning because the government sent its troops back into the streets and they killed anything that moved. After that the country returned to calm.

In their desire to see democracy

triumph, everyone seemed to forget that public discontent does not bring down dictatorships. What does destroy them is confusion in the dictatorship's own mind as to whether it will or will not mow down its own citizenry. Violent generals who hesitate or attempt to become liberal usually do fall. But Ne Win, early in the crisis during his false resignation speech, said quite clearly, 'I have to inform the people throughout the country that when the army shoots, it shoots to kill.' That was precisely what it did.

What appeared at first to be hesitation and confusion from the military was, in fact, cool self-confidence. They were simply waiting for the opposition to surface completely so that its effective leaders could be identified. As a result, almost all except a handful of well known personalities are being gradually arrested or have fled. As for the street repression, the army moved slowly in order to find the right level of violence to re-establish order.

The international assumption that there would be a return to democracy and a relaunching of the Burmese economy was based upon the idea that there was a government to replace and an economy to relaunch. In reality there is not and never has been a Burmese government. There are no services. There is no road building, no public works, no health services, virtually no economic activity. The only effective supply of goods is from black markets. The port of Rangoon, once the greatest in Asia, has been increasingly derelict since the Japanese war time occupation. The government has not controlled more than 40 per cent of what is technically its territory since 1940. The other 60 per cent consists of the mountainous zones which surround the central Irrawaddy valley. Those areas are dominated by a collection of minorities — Shans, Karens, Akkas and so on — who are in constant revolt. This means that it is impossible to reach Rangoon by land if coming from one of the four surrounding countries.

And most of Burma's riches lie in those hills — the gems, jade, teak and minerals. Burmese production of these has dwindled to almost nothing because they cannot be



'I'll have it in gallons, with lead!'