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Symposium

Rereading *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*

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Abstract. These essays were originally presented at a symposium of the same title that took place at the annual meeting of the American Association of the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Toronto on November 20, 2003. The charge to the participants was to "to reread the book and make short presentations on it, its significance, the validity of its analysis in hindsight, its historical contribution to our understanding of late communism, its influence on others." The symposium was timed to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of writing of the book in 1973–1974 as well as the twenty-fifth anniversary of its publication in English in 1979.

Konrád and Szelényi's model of socialism, twenty-five years later

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Konrád and Szelényi's *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (henceforth *Intellectuals*) exerted a powerful influence on our thinking about sociopolitical organization in Eastern Europe. In rereading it now, I find that the remarkable contribution it made has deepened with age; it is even better than I remembered from my first reading of it in 1988. I discover much that is deeply familiar from my years of living in Romania before 1989, and I take great pleasure in its tremendous range, as it moves from history to social theory to political sociology, from Marx to Bakunin to Lenin to Weber to Polanyi. Furthermore, it displays an extraordinary breadth and coherence of vision, especially evident in its remarkable discussion of the history of East European intellectuals (part III) but manifest throughout. The relentless logic and "rationality" of their argument, covering many disparate areas of life in socialism, are overwhelming.

There are several ways in which we might read this book, my colleagues' essays here being some examples. Among them are to assess either its predictions for the rise of a new class of "intellectuals" or the

productivity of its mode of analysis. In my view, although its predictions were provocative, they were ultimately flawed – and while they may have had impact on political action in Hungary or Eastern Europe, it is not clear they had a significant influence upon scholarship in the United States. The book's mode of analysis, by contrast, was extremely productive for thinking about the nature of socialist societies – which they state as their main aim, and it was understood as such by reviewers like Alec Nove.[1] In my comments, I do not take on the question of whether intellectuals formed a new class but instead I concentrate on their model of socialism; it is there that I see the book's main influence.

The image of socialism in *Intellectuals* descends from a worthy line of ancestors and has numerous cousins. They include Bakunin, Trotsky, and Djilas, as well as other East Europeans writing in the late 1960s into 1970s – the Poles Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski (whose "Open Letter to the Communist Party" written in 1964 appeared in English in 1968); the East German Rudolph Bahro (*The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, published in Germany in 1977, four years after Konrád and Szelényi's manuscript was written); the Romanian Felipe Garcia Casals (the pseudonym of Pavel Campeanu, whose *Syncretic Society* first appeared in English in 1980 but was written sometime before 1977); Czechs and Slovaks such as Václav Havel (his *Power of the Powerless* first appeared in 1977)[2] and Milan Šimecka (*The Normalization of Order*, published in Czech in 1979)[3]; the Hungarians György Bence and János Kis, who published their *Towards an East European Marxism* in English under the pseudonym "Marc Rakovski" in 1978),[4] as well as Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller, and György Márkus (their *Dictatorship over Needs* appeared in English in 1983). All these works offered critical theoretical analyses of Soviet-type societies. You have to have a taste for ideal-type models to find this kind of work a useful heuristic exercise, and although some now see such taste as outmoded, I myself have not lost it.

What is it that I particularly admire in this book? I single out three things: the authors' definition of intellectuals, their insistence on the special *teleological* quality of those in Eastern Europe, and their starting with Weber's modes of domination rather than Marx's modes of production (as did several of the other critics of the system). First, in their definition of intellectuals, they anticipate the arguments of people like Pierre Bourdieu and Zygmunt Bauman.[5] The authors argue that one is an intellectual not because one has a certain amount of education, a certain critical vocation, or a capacity to transcend narrow social

and political interests: one is an intellectual according to the kinds of claims through which one justifies one's social position. According to the authors, the intelligentsia seeks to obtain power and reward for itself by exploiting its relative monopoly of complex knowledge as a means of achieving these goals. The heart of the matter, then, is not to be found in a knowledge that is functionally necessary, but rather in the desire to legitimize aspirations to power. Thus it is not merely knowledge that makes someone an intellectual, but the fact that he has no other title to his status except for his knowledge.[6]

With this definition, the authors refuse East European intellectuals' self-description, and they include in the category not only the technical or humanistic elite with its various forms of expertise but also the ruling communist elite with its "scientific socialism." The definition also sets the predominant tone of the book: ironic, detached, and critical. Although some reviewers complained that the definition was too broad, Konrád and Szelényi claimed that the "intellectual" category was indeed very broad, precisely because the "vanguard party" placed such emphasis on its superior knowledge of the laws of social development in the planning process – that is, knowledge claims were lodged at the very heart of rule, in a way very different from rule in capitalist systems. I find this a brilliant way of trying to stand aside from the way they themselves as well as their friends would define their own place in Hungarian society, in order to arrive at a more useful analytic treatment of their own stratum.[7]

Second, Konrád and Szelényi emphasize the historical specificity of intellectuals in Eastern Europe as "teleological" intellectuals, their characteristic form of rationality being not formal or procedural (Weber's *Zweckrationalität*) but substantive, ends- and values-oriented rationality (*Wertrationalität*). Many critics seem to have missed this in the book's argument, complaining that its authors were attributing rationality to a system that was far from rational;[8] the critics failed to understand that the form of rationality that Konrád and Szelényi intended was quite different from the one in terms of which they themselves were thinking. Socialist bureaucrats as well as nation-defining intellectuals did operate in terms of a rationality, claims *Intellectuals*, but it was one oriented to ends, not means. Those ends might differ – bureaucrats envisioned a communist utopia while other intellectuals envisioned national liberation – but both operated in terms of teleologies. Konrád and Szelényi's notion of teleological intellectuals working in terms of a moral mission is critical to understanding how so many intellectuals

could end up in power after 1989: because they were seen to have high moral capital.

Third, Konrád and Szelényi start from a novel vantage point: Weber's analysis of modes of authority or domination, as opposed to Marx's analysis of modes of production (contrast Márkus's analysis in *Dictatorship over Needs*[9]). They take seriously the ideology of the socialist system as their starting point (that is, they begin with "superstructure" rather than "base") and then offer a critique of it. This is unusual for a self-professed Marxist analysis, and to my mind it afforded them valuable new insights. Asking what the dominant principles of legitimation are in socialism, that is, what justifies the Party's claims to appropriate the social surplus and to determine how to reproduce ongoing social and political life, they answer that what legitimates the socialist system is the dominant ideology of "rational redistribution." It begins in the slogan "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need" (modified by Lenin as "to each according to his work," until sufficient abundance could be achieved to reward according to need). All else flows from here.

Given the dominant role of the Communist Party and its ideology in the economy, this makes more sense than starting with socialism's mode of production. It also makes more sense given the situation in Hungary at the time. By the end of the 1970s, Hungary had achieved its reputation as the exemplar of goulash communism, in which the Party in effect agreed to maintain an acceptable standard of living in exchange for people's not opposing the Party leadership. Under these circumstances, it made good sense to analyze socialism by examining consumption and the ideologies supporting it. In my opinion this is why *Intellectuals* could only have been written in Hungary; for Romania, that starting point would not have made as much sense. (We can see this by contrasting *Intellectuals* with Campeanu's *Syncretic Society*, whose picture of socialism could scarcely be more different from theirs).

Let me use this observation to point to a couple of problems that I see with the model of socialism offered in this book. First, Szelényi himself says that the analysis better suits the 1960s and early 1970s than later and agrees that it suits Hungary much better than elsewhere – Hungary, with its intellectuals deeply implicated in its extensive reforms, its higher level of consumption, and its second economy, which (they say) pressed social stratification in a different direction from that of the other countries.[10] I conclude from this that their theoretical arguments may

be limited (not surprisingly) to socialisms approaching the Hungarian type, and that we should be cautious in applying those arguments to countries like Romania or Bulgaria, very different from Hungary. This caution is bred, of course, by the shortcomings of all such ideal-type models: inevitably, some cases fit better than others.

Second, Konrád and Szelényi argue that from the viewpoint of rational redistributors, the system's basic principle is to maximize the surplus available for redistribution:

> For the redistributors the economy is rational if it maximizes the size of the surplus product made available for redistributive decision; if, in other words, the percentage of the national income which is drawn into the state budget for purposes of redistribution is as large as possible. The bigger the budget, the greater the power of the officials who administer it.[11]

I fear, however, that this is overly simplistic. For one thing, to administer such a budget requires a level of bureaucratic capacity that communist parties did not necessarily have. For another, that analysis provides us with an account only of simple, rather than extended, reproduction. Perhaps more useful, I think, is maximizing not the surplus available for redistribution but the Party's *monopoly control over* the redistributable surplus – not the same thing. In the work of Pavel Campeanu[12] and Jan Gross[13] we find two analyses that in my view improve Konrád and Szelényi's proposition. Campeanu argues that the motor of socialist systems was to maximize the accumulation not of redistributables but of the means of production under the Party's control; these will then repeatedly create further resources for redistribution (that is, his is a model of extended reproduction). If the system maximized only the accumulation of redistributables, as Konrád and Szelényi indicate, these might be used up every year. Jan Gross adds to this the idea of the "spoiler state" as a characteristic of socialist systems: a state that spoils alternative possibilities for anyone else to gain independent access to resources, for to permit this would facilitate challenges to the center's mobilization of resources. Hence the persecution of second-economy activity – in most East European countries except Hungary. I think Gross's argument affords us deeper insight into the following statement by Konrád and Szelényi:

> Rational-redistributive society . . . can best be described as a *dichotomous* class structure in which the classical antagonism of capitalist and proletarian is replaced by a new one between an intellectual class being formed around the position of the redistributors, and a working class *deprived of any right to participate in redistribution*.[14]

Just as Marx pointed to the tension between the *capitalists' desire to maximize profits* and the *systemic drive to maximize surplus value*, the tension in socialism is between the *bureaucrats' desire to maximize the accumulation of redistributables* and the *systemic drive to maximize monopoly control over them* by undermining alternative loci of production outside the purview of the state. Yet we arrive at this formulation only by questioning the very fruitful way in which Konrád and Szelényi posed the central question: how is socialism legitimated?

Let me close now with some thoughts concerning my own discipline, anthropology. When I discovered *Intellectuals* in 1988, no one in my field had commented on it – but then again, hardly anyone in my field was working in Eastern Europe at the time. Why might an anthropologist have been susceptible to this book? To begin with, in the 1970s and 1980s anthropology in the United States was much influenced by Marxist analysis in general and French structural Marxism in particular; both predisposed us to the idea that we can identify inner logics of different modes of production. Such logics were the goal of analysis for scholars such as Claude Meillassoux, Emmanuel Terray, Catherine Coquéry-Vidrovitch, and Maurice Godelier in France, all writing about the logic of the "lineage mode of production." In the United States, the work of Eric R. Wolf, especially his magisterial *Europe and the People Without History*, had similar effect.[15] (Not that anthropologists had never thought in terms of "system logics," albeit in a different sense – what else is the message of, for instance, Ruth Benedict's celebrated *Patterns of Culture*?) This widely accepted paradigm in the anthropology of the 1970s-1980s made Konrád and Szelényi's book easy for an anthropologist to like, for it did the same kind of thing.

In anthropology there was the additional assumption that part of a system's logic would include not only forces and relations of production but also "culture." This was the legacy of Franz Boas, who brought German thought into U.S. anthropology; it also reflected the influence of Max Weber upon the eminent anthropologist Clifford Geertz, both of whom anthropologists read in theory courses. With Boas, Weber, and Geertz, U.S. anthropologists (unlike our British counterparts) found culture essential to any social analysis; therefore Konrád and Szelényi's way of looking to Weber and to culture (in the form of ideology) to discover the system logic of socialism was very congenial to us.

Finally, I would point to the significance of Karl Polanyi, with his modes of economic integration, in the economic anthropology of the

1970s. There we found the idea of redistributive societies as forming a major class alongside societies governed by reciprocity or the market. This idea, and Polanyi's insistence on seeing the economy as culturally embedded, plays a major role in Konrád and Szelényi's analysis, further predisposing it to consumption by anthropologists.

Thus, the conditions were present for anthropologists to give *Intellectuals* a positive reception. The problem, however, was that practically no one in anthropology was working in Eastern Europe or was interested in models of socialism. I read the book ten years after it came out, along with other works mentioned above, having decided that for my book on national ideology under socialism I needed a model of socialism to frame the processes I described. My reading of Weber for my undergraduate thesis, my familiarity with Polanyi from graduate courses, my eleven years of exposure to Marxism in the anthropology department at Johns Hopkins University, and my admiration for the work of Eric Wolf all came together to make my reading of *Intellectuals* a profoundly stimulating one.

The model of socialism that I gradually worked out was deeply indebted to Konrád and Szelényi, as well as to György Márkus, János Kornai, and Pavel Campeanu.[16] Since this synthetic model of socialism is the most widely cited argument in the anthropology of socialism and postsocialism, we see that *Intellectuals* has ongoing influence in anthropology. The events of postsocialism are revealing the inadequacies of that synthetic model, but keeping an eye on Ivan's more recent work will stimulate further rethinking of what socialism was, and how that affects what comes next.

The failure to consolidate class power and the end of Soviet-type regimes in East Central Europe

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I read Konrád and Szelényi as a graduate student when it first came out. Along with the early works of other East European oppositionists (in fact, the same round of suspects mentioned in Katherine Verdery's essay), it had a profound effect on my thinking at that time. I can think of several other young American scholars who were affected in the same way (among those participating in the symposium, Michael Kennedy).

First, it sensitized us to the fact that there were unofficial forms of social and intellectual life that had escaped the notice of the popular media and many scholars studying Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. We were struck that such phenomena were understudied and that they represented a new and significant development in the politics of the region. We were confirmed in this belief by the emergence of Solidarity in Poland.

Second, it made us aware that it was possible to step outside the context of the Cold War and do critical work on the nature of Soviet-type societies. It was not that most of us did not find Cold War issues interesting, did not take them seriously, or have strong feelings about the conflict between the West and the Soviet Bloc; it was just that we thought that to have a true picture of these societies, one had to distance oneself intellectually from the rhetoric of both sides. The book was inspiring in that it attempted to do just that.

The most profound effect the book had on my thinking about Soviet-type societies at the time was the way in which it extended the concept of class in a way that went beyond Marx and even Weber, and made it relevant to an understanding of Soviet-type societies. It seemed clear that one of the ways in which Soviet-type systems failed miserably to live up to the ethical aims of socialism was in the replacement of one form of class society with another. Konrád and Szelényi's contention that there is a specific social relation around which classes form in any modern society was an enduring step forward. Here I refer to their idea that each society has a model of *economic integration*. Here they used Polyani to get out of the trap of property relations and ownership defining class in a Marxian sense. Marxist conceptualizations led to the treatment of intellectuals in Soviet-type societies as a stratum and this clearly limited our ability to engage in a critical analysis of the whole social formation due to the importance of intellectuals in it. Konrád and Szelényi instead posed the idea that intellectuals exercised (or were beginning to exercise) class power based on knowledge, which legitimated their role in the teleological redistribution of wealth. Like Katherine Verdery, I find the idea that this sort of redistributive power was central to Soviet-type societies to be an essential and enduring contribution.

In rereading the book, like Gale Stokes, I was struck by its ambiguity about the actual status of the class rule of intellectuals. In my case though, this ambiguity is one of the focuses of my essay. At

times Konrád and Szelényi talk about intellectuals as a ruling class being *in statu nascendi,*[17] and at other times they seem to speak as if this were already a *fait accompli*. A related ambiguity concerns the relationship of the communist party elite and the intellectual class as a whole. It is not fully clear to me whether the elite is seen by the authors as an element of the class, or as in some sense standing over it.

Here it is useful to review what Konrád and Szelényi say about the class generally. It is composed of three strata; the first of which is composed of economists and technocrats. This first stratum "actually carries out the work of rational redistribution." It is joined by an administrative and police bureaucracy "which guarantees the undisturbed functioning of the redistributive process" and "the ideological, scientific, and artistic intelligentsia, which produces, perpetuates, and disseminates the culture of rational redistribution."[18] At the time of the writing of the book Konrád and Szelényi talk of rule being based on an alliance between the ruling elite and the technocracy.[19] Yet at other times they say that the role of the elite is to look to the interests of the class as a whole.[20] What remains unclear to me is how the elite tends to the interests of the class as a whole, yet enters into alliance with one component of it, the technocracy.

Another impression that rereading the book made upon me was that the perspective was clearly marked by the time and place of its writing. There are two factors particularly relevant to the time and place of the book's origins, Hungary in the 1970s. First, pre-modern Hungary was one of the few countries in the region that had a large and dominant gentry class. With the rise of modernity, elements from the gentry adapted themselves to changed circumstances by becoming intellectuals. The ethos of the gentry, its traditions, and its self-identity as central to the nation remained part of the culture of the intellectual class even under communism. The only other countries with as strong an intellectual tradition were Poland and the Czechlands, though in the case of the latter, the social origins were different.[21] The question that this raises is the extent to which the centrality of intellectuals was a general characteristic of Soviet-type systems or was it a particularity of its transposition to those parts of Central Europe that already had a strong intelligentsia?

The second factor that bears raising here is that Hungary was exceptional with regard to economic reform among Communist countries.

Two aspects are particularly relevant. First, rationalization of the system of planning by the incorporation of market elements was far more advanced in Hungary than anywhere else, except perhaps for Yugoslavia. Second, the adoption of these policies was spearheaded by an in-party reformist intelligentsia, a formation that again was comparatively strong in Hungary.[22] Thus the picture of the technocracy and the elite in alliance with each other makes strong sense in Hungary.

The question is whether this alliance makes sense anywhere else in the Soviet bloc in the 1970s. At least from the perspective of Poland, it makes a certain amount of sense in the early 1970s when the Gierek regime attempted to revitalize the Polish economy by an import-led growth strategy that relied on an influx of western technology financed by loans. This too was a technocratic response to the limitations of the planned economy. With the outright failure of these reforms, however, and the emergence of a persistent state of crisis in Poland from 1976–1989, every fraction of the intellectual class was beset by conflict and it in no way resembled a coherent political entity.

Within the technocracy, substantial differences emerged over the extent to which the market and workers' councils should be used to reform the economy. The ideological, scientific, and artistic intelligentsia was largely in open revolt against the regime for the whole period. And even within the administrative and police bureaucracy there were differences between soft- and hard-line factions over the degree of physical repression that should be used to restore order, with hard-line factions pushing for even greater repression. Beyond this, there was intense antipathy between the different groups, especially the political and cultural components of the class. In Poland by the late 1970s, we see a class at war with itself for the soul of the nation.

By way of comparison to Czechoslovakia, the moment of rationalizing reform of the economy in that country came and went with the Prague Spring. With the post-1968 normalization, the political and administrative elite successfully confined the technocracy and the cultural elite into a straightjacket of orthodoxy.[23] Thus in the Czechlands, we see a hard-line elite forcibly repressing even the most moderate reform efforts of intellectuals. The nature of rule and role of the intellectual class in both Poland and Czechoslovakia seems to be startlingly different from the pattern in Hungary. In neither of these countries does

the picture resemble consolidated class rule. This stands in sharp contrast to Hungary, where after the post-1956 normalization the party was careful to cultivate reformist intellectuals and tried to keep them within the bounds of the party, even when reform efforts were sidetracked or blocked. Thus, when the New Economic Mechanism was curtailed in 1973, economic reformers remained in the party despite the repression of more critical intellectuals.[24] That reformist faction was able to rebound and extend economic reform in 1979, and remained an important player in the party, as well as in the postcommunist successor party.

So, if the notion of class rule by the intellectuals is something that seems more plausible in Hungary, and to a certain extent in Poland and Czechoslovakia, in the 1960s and 1970s than anywhere else in the Soviet bloc, does this limit the importance of Konrád and Szelényi's analysis? My answer is no. The historical juncture captured in the book is one that is critical to the development of Soviet-type systems. The 1960s and 1970s constitute the period when the redistributive model of economic development came to the limit of its utility as an alternative to capitalism.[25] Soviet-type systems were adept at promoting extensive growth, in mobilizing underutilized resources in agrarian economies, and at channeling them into the industrial sector. They were good at creating new sources of capital and labor and deploying them in the economy. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, most bloc economies were fully mobilized and if they were to continue to develop, they needed to find sources of intensive growth, i.e., make existing endowments of capital and labor more productive. The economic reforms proposed during the Prague Spring, the Hungarian NEM, and Gierek's attempts to use western technology bought on credit were all somewhat different responses to this problem.

This was the moment in the history of Soviet-type systems that the book so effectively captures. Given the critical importance of knowledge in the process of rationalizing the planned economy, it was a moment when the intellectuals could potentially have played a greater role in the system. Clearly the technocrats were the people with the most to gain. One might nevertheless expect some tension between those who worked in the institutions of centralized planning and those at the level of the firm (with the latter group being the more enthusiastic about decentralization). Perhaps the intelligentsia, too, had something to gain, in that an economy of this type would put

greater stress on education and knowledge, and this would probably lead to weakening of the prohibitions on thought posed by censorship, or even the dropping of formal censorship.[26] It would seem, however, that the political and administrative component of the intellectual class would have the most to lose, as the decentralization involved in economic reform would weaken their degree of control over society.

Thus, it is not surprising that Central European intellectuals, given the importance of the intelligentsia tradition in the region or the region's place in the experimentation with reforms meant to rationalize Soviet-type economies, would understand the ramifications of such a moment for their class. Even more so, that Hungarian intellectuals would strongly perceive such a moment, given that country's higher degree of success with reform, is also logical.

The potential limitation in the analysis presented in the book is not the apprehension of the historical importance of the moment at which it was written, but that the moment itself did not fully reach its fruition. Such experiments proved to be enduring only in Hungary and Yugoslavia, with the Jaruzelski regime in Poland continuing to toy with such ideas without fully embracing them. And even in Hungary and Yugoslavia, the reforms were not sufficient to fend off economic stagnation. That Konrád and Szelényi did not see this coming in 1974 is not surprising; after all they only claimed to be framing a critical theory of Soviet-type societies, not practicing divination.[27]

In retrospect, the class rule of intellectuals was something inherently possible in the history of Soviet-type regimes, but with the defeat of rationalizing economic reform in 1960s and 1970s, it did not come to pass. Instead, the ruling elite in these societies remained inherently political. As the Leninist party transformed itself into the ruling kernel of a vast bureaucratic system under Stalin, something historically unprecedented emerged: a sovereign bureaucracy. In this it was radically different from other bureaucracies that ordinarily act as the agent of some other set of social interests. This is what Polish sociologist Maria Hirszowicz argued in her book on the bureaucratic Leviathan state that emerged in Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe.[28] This bureaucracy ruled in its own interest, but as its transformative historical mission faltered and its ideological ardor cooled in favor of the mundane interests of its adherents, it could no longer effectively manage the complex, modern, class society it had created.[29]

Konrád and Szelényi cannot be faulted for not anticipating the political failure of economic reforms from the vantage point of 1973–1974. Still, the rejection of the reform moment they capture in the work not only prevented the consolidation of intellectual class rule, but also helps to explain why Soviet-type systems collapsed so quickly. When the political elite rejected the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, they not only failed to address the crisis of intensive growth in the economy, but also lost the political support of a substantial portion of the intellectual class. By the 1980s, intellectuals had very little to lose by abandoning the system, even second-tier party leaders (who today curiously seem to make up a good part of the club of postcommunist prime ministers in the region). Ironically, in the absence of substantial private property, their social capital, connections (both domestic and international), and educational advantages positioned intellectuals to do well economically and politically under a liberal-democratic market system. In "succeeding," however, they have converted their social power under one system into new forms of power under yet another. Thus, while intellectuals have generally done well both as a group and as individuals since 1989, they seem to have abandoned the project of intellectual class rule altogether. This too is an irony not anticipated by Konrád and Szelényi, but one that I am sure they appreciate.

Irony and continuity in East European history: Thoughts on *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*

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Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power can be read on at least two levels. Both involve strong ironies. On one level, the one on which I first read it, it is a contribution to a Marxist analysis of East European communism, which pointed to a familiar theme of emancipatory intentions and universalist ideologies ultimately being tools of domination and particular interests. Konrád and Szelényi framed their book as an alternative to the narrative of totalitarianism, a narrative that identified the core features of communism as political dictatorship and bureaucratic economy. Theirs was an immanent critique of the system that permitted direct cross-systemic comparison with the West and was supplemented with a sort of negative cunning of history in which the tools and ideologies of emancipation were ultimately turned against the objects of liberation, the working class, and for the particular benefit of the people who thought they were doing the emancipating, the intellectuals.

At a second, deeper, level, however, this book is also a study in the irony of historical continuity that is particular to the region of East-Central Europe. It is on this second irony that I would like to focus my attention in this short essay. In contrast to what many historians and political scientists were still teaching their students in the 1970s and 1980s, that 1945 represented a radical break with the past in Eastern Europe, Konrád and Szelényi put forth in their book an intriguing thesis of continuity between the pattern of modernization in Eastern Europe after the Napoleonic Wars until 1945 and what occurred under communist rule. This pattern Konrád and Szelényi termed "rational redistribution." The "rational" here referred not to "optimal" but rather to the intention of the late modernizers to use the enlightenment tools of state and statecraft to catch up with the more economically and militarily advanced West.

The result was the familiar pattern of state-led modernization that contrasted with the market-led western pattern, and rendered class formation, the legitimate scope of state authority, dominant ideas about what constitutes "the good life," and just about everything else that matters for political development different from what occurred in the West. For example, in the East entrepreneurial functions were disproportionately taken over by ethnically foreign elements, thus tainting the entire enterprise of modernization as something somehow foreign. Most importantly for Konrád and Szelényi, rational redistribution recast the role of intellectuals, who were disproportionately made up of the sons of the declining native noble and middle classes and who sought refuge from the market in state employment, into a sort of service intelligentsia of the state rather than an independent stratum of people who shaped the background culture of the societies in which they lived. This particularly toxic brew, a fusion between educated elites and an overweening state apparatus, created the groundwork, even before 1945, for what Konrád and Szelényi maintained was a gradual transformation of the educated classes of Eastern Europe into the potentially dominant class in the communist period.

Helping us to situate the communist period within the broader framework of East European economic and political development and posing the question of how it should be situated will, I believe, be the lasting contribution of this book. Much more so than the answers it provides, this book is important for the questions it poses. Time and again, one is drawn to the question of continuity and change. Rereading *Intellectuals*

on the Road, one is tempted to look upon the communist era as one where the basics of the "Eastern pattern" did not really change at all. Today it still trails the West in economic development and is playing "catch-up." The countries of the region are once again bit players in the game of international capitalism, competing against each other for investment and trade opportunities. Its political elites are once again trying to integrate themselves into the broader economic and security structures of external powers. And, from the standpoint of Konrád and Szelényi's book, as well as Szelényi's more recent work, the educated classes in Eastern Europe have been busy trying to convert their intellectual capital into financial and economic capital, even though these intellectuals squabble with each other a bit too much, I think, to be thought of as a "class" and they sloughed off the communist system a bit too easily for me to think of them as having been the emerging dominant players within it.

Even so, rereading this book does force one to ask, what has changed? Did communism matter at all? Did the "eastern pattern" simply continue under different ideological form? Is history then in some important way doomed to repeat itself? The student of East-Central Europe in 1990, looking back on the year 1919, could easily have been excused for believing just that, that history *was* about to repeat itself. In both eras, inexperienced political elites confronted relatively backward economies, collapsed trading blocs, polarized politics, and intractable ethnic conflicts. After 1919, these problems quickly led to the collapse of democracy in the region (with the notable exception of Czechoslovakia). What was to keep these democracies from collapsing again? To be sure, there has been significant democratic backsliding in the region, especially in the non-Baltic republics of the former Soviet Union. Yet in the decade after 1989 there were encouraging signs of progress toward democratic stability in many postcommunist Europe countries that were in previous eras anything but stable. How did this progress come about?

Poland's interwar democracy collapsed in 1926 with Marshal Pilsudski's *coup d'etat* amid economic disorder, street demonstrations, and decreasing confidence in political parties and parliamentary institutions. Postcommunist Poland, by contrast, despite initial economic conditions that were at least as unfavorable as its interwar counterpart (parties and parliamentary institutions that were widely regarded as self-serving and ineffective, and a level of protest that far exceeded

anything in the interwar era), was widely regarded by the end of the 1990s as the most dynamic democracy in the region and a pretty good model for successful economic transformation. Similar observations could be made for Estonia and Slovenia. And who would have thought that Hungary, a country that did not have a single free and fair election in the interwar period, would become the darling of the European Union and its leading candidate for accession during the decade after 1989?

These observations, as stylized as they are, suggest that not only was communism a period of continuities but also one of change. What changed in Eastern Europe in the half century after 1939 that could have helped alter the age-old "eastern pattern" Konrád and Szelényi so compactly describe? Did communism have anything to do with this? If so, one would be forced to rethink what it was about the communist version of rational redistributionism that set the region down a new path.

Several important changes did occur between the interwar and the post-communist era. First on this list is the economic modernization that occurred during the communist period. Most of the countries of the region became more urban, less agrarian, and more educated than in the interwar period. Przreworski and Limongi's recent work indicates the importance of having a GDP per capita of more than $6000 (in 1993 dollars) for sustaining democracy.[30] It is noteworthy that many of the countries of East-Central Europe passed through this threshold during or just after the communist period. Even so, it is difficult to give the communist governments of the region much credit for their economic performance. Some growth may have occurred under virtually any social order. The income disparities already present between East and West before 1945 remained unchanged or grew between 1945 and 1989.[31] In fact, communism in Eastern Europe was rejected in part because of its dismal economic performance compared to Western Europe.

A second important change that occurred in the half-century between 1939 and 1989 also had little to do with rational redistribution per se, namely the huge demographic changes that occurred during and after World War II throughout the region. I refer here primarily to the destruction of East European Jewry. As a result of the Holocaust, ethnic entrepreneurship is no longer nearly the same kind of issue that it was before 1945. Konrád and Szelényi explain anti-Semitism in modern

Eastern Europe as an early reaction against rational redistribution. Yet today, capitalist modernization is no longer viewed as being led by completely alien elements, except by politically marginal and extremist groups, for the simple reason that the aliens are no long present. Of course, this change was also not primarily the work of the communists. It was the work of the Nazis, which makes it all the more painful and ironic. Societies such as interwar Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia that were deeply multicultural in a genuine, as opposed to simulated western, sense, are now basically mono-cultural and thus basically safe for western style multiculturalism.[32] The scapegoats of rational redistribution, in particular the Jews, are simply no longer present. The same can be said for the German minorities throughout the region whose expulsion *was* the work of the communist authorities.

As important as both modernization and ethnic cleansing are in explaining the relative success of post-communist democracy, I would like to turn our attention to one further feature of the communist version of rational redistribution. My own field, political science, has now spent more than a decade analyzing the negative legacies of communist rule and theorized about how the "Leninist legacies" can be overcome.[33] Fewer scholars, however, have discussed the *positive* legacies of the Leninist version of rational redistribution and how these legacies may have helped pave the way for successful democracy and capitalist development in the post-communist era. Yet as Konrád and Szelényi's book reminds us over and over again, one need not be an adherent of Marxism-Leninism to appreciate the ironies of history. Thirty-five years ago, Ralf Dahrendorf, in his classic *Society and Democracy in Germany*, argued that Nazism destroyed the social basis for authoritarianism in Germany. Dahrendorf's book and many others like it illustrate how difficult it was for Germany to break with a closed, status-based society. Brutal as it may have been, "the break with tradition and thus the strong push toward modernity was the substantive characteristic of the social revolution of National Socialism."[34] Among the many tragedies of the Nazi dictatorship, Dahrendorf found one more painful. If the resistance to Nazism, which was largely aristocratic in composition and which he refers to as "counterrevolutionary," had succeeded in assassinating Hitler and taking power, Germany's chances for democracy in the postwar period would have been far less certain. "While the social revolution of National Socialism was an instrument in the establishment of totalitarian forms, by the same token it had to create the basis of liberal modernity; the counterrevolution on the other

hand can be understood only as a revolt of tradition, and thus of illiberalism and of the authoritarianism of a surviving past." Although Nazi ideology was in many respects traditionalistic, the practice of Nazi rule broke down the traditional loyalties on which German authoritarianism depended.

So, too, one can argue for communist rule. As romantically as they were sometimes viewed in the West during the Communist era and continue to be even today, the societies of interwar Eastern Europe, with the exception of the Czechlands, did not provide fertile soil for democracy. Poland and Hungary, for example, were societies of deep inequalities in which social distinctions could not easily be bridged. In this regard, it is worth recalling Tocqueville's comments on the United States, where he argued that what distinguished the United States was that differences in material wealth were not overlaid with stark distinctions in status. This characteristic made for an essential equality of condition and created the climate for healthy democracy. The opposite applies to most states of interwar Eastern Europe. Not only were inequalities material, but, perhaps more importantly, they involved status, the kind of inequality that money does not easily overcome. The elites of these societies were distinctly "clubbish" in their behavior and attitudes, and they did not easily admit outsiders.

Could it not be true that part of the Leninist legacy in places like Poland and Hungary was to create a rough and ready material and status equality and, therefore, the basis for democracy of the sort that could not have possibly existed in the interwar societies? Of course, the privileges of the nomenklatura contradicted the official egalitarian ideal and provided much grist for books such as *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*. Once the party bosses could be pushed aside, however, the social reality that remained, even though it was one that was marked by inequalities and the potential for growth in inequalities that Szelenyi has documented in his recent work, was in terms both of social status and material condition, much more favorable to healthy liberal democracy than it had ever been. Communism still did a great deal of damage in other respects, both human and "developmental." In the Czech lands, for example, Communism yielded a decayed and backward industrial base and not much else (it was, then, in this sense "unnecessary"). Still, it is difficult to deny that there is a greater affinity between democracy and Polish and Hungarian society today than seventy years ago.

Of course, it would be absurd to maintain that had the Hungarian revolutionaries in 1956 managed to overthrow the regime, institute democracy, and successfully declare Austrian-style neutrality that the country would still have been better off remaining communist for thirty-three more years – just as absurd as cheering for Hitler's body guards in July 1944. As social scientists we do not need to go that far. It may simply be enough to note that one cumulative result of four decades of communist rule has been, in some respects and in some countries, to prepare the way for successful capitalist and democratic development of the Western as opposed to Eastern sort.

The final important difference from the interwar era is the geopolitical landscape. The international context that helped create rational redistributionism and intensified its "perfection" under communism after 1945, namely the unequal and enduring economic development and military capacities of East and West, is arguably much different today. Whereas great power politics conspired before and after 1945 to keep the pattern of development in Eastern Europe different from that in the West, since 1989 we have witnessed a concerted effort to integrate the states of Eastern Europe into the economic and security structures of the West. A further irony of communism, then, is how the four decades of forced isolation from the West created a deep and abiding longing to return to a cooperative Europe that had never actually existed before 1945. Furthermore, it was *communism* (or, more precisely, the threat of communism) that provided the crucial impetus for overcoming the historical divide between France and Germany, thus paving the way for the uniting of Europe. It is worth recalling that, although the revolutions of 1989 were made in the name of liberal democracy, this regime type had been instituted successfully almost nowhere in Eastern Europe. Much more important for liberalism's attractiveness was the relentless cultural cold war waged by the West against the East over a forty-year period that held up Western Europe as a model that could be emulated in the East, if only it were not for Communism. After 1989, the promise of joining the West and especially the prospect of joining the European Union, combined with the absence of viable ideological and institutional alternatives (like Communism), was so strong that even countries that had little in the way of democratic traditions, well developed capitalist middle classes, bourgeois virtues, or the economic "prerequisites" of democracy have consistently emulated western modes of political conduct and discourse in the hope of securing a place among the elect. To the extent that the new Europe

of cooperative rather than conflictual development is extended to the East, the international foundations of rational redistribution may no longer exist.

There are then perhaps even deeper ironies to rational redistribution than Konrád and Szelényi could see when they wrote this book in the 1970s. For although rational redistribution appeared to them as the "perfection" of the Eastern pattern of modernization, it may also have helped foster both the domestic and international conditions for shattering the pattern of continuity in East-Central Europe. In addition to the legacies of the past half century that had nothing to do with communism itself, the impact of both communism's rough and ready egalitarianism and the new Europe made attractive by the predations of communism, may have decisively altered the confining conditions in which the post-communist democracies of East-Central Europe find themselves today. Of course, to the degree that these societies are unable to sustain a basic egalitarian ethos and to the extent that the promise of joining the "West" is not kept by the West itself, or is enlarged to a select few societies, the conditions that gave rise to and sustained rational redistribution three centuries ago may not be gone for good.

The irony of *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*

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One of the most intriguing things about Konrád and Szelényi's book, returning to it after twenty-five years, is how pleasing it is (surprising would not be the right word) to find what a good piece of work it is. A great many of its ideas have entered into the conventional wisdom as appropriate templates for the historical development of Eastern Europe and the text is logically and often convincingly argued. The book's analytic weakness, however, remains the same as when it first came out, namely, the confusion surrounding the standing of the various subsets of the intellectual class in what the authors call the second stage of socialism, the stage in which they were actually writing. Even though the authors clearly recognize that it is not the intellectual class as a whole but the ruling or governing elite that actually fulfills the functions of central redistribution,[35] the latter portions of the book exhibit considerable confusion between the intelligentsia as an entire class and its subsets, primarily the technocracy and the elites. The authors frame

their discussion as a friendly conversation with Milovan Djilas, particularly with his concept of the new class.[36] There is no question that this book is more sophisticated than Djilas's analysis, and that the authors are more skilled theoreticians. But whereas appropriate certification is necessary for advancement into the intelligentsia, it is not sufficient for the exercise of real power. That comes only with complaisant behavior toward the elite into which the *intelligent* is attempting to move. Therefore, one might ask if even the title of the book is adequate. Could intellectuals reasonably have been seen to be on a road to class power, or would it have been more plausible to recognize that they were enmeshed in a system of subservience to those who dominated the structures within which they had to operate? Clearly this is an unfair question, shaped by twenty-five years of hindsight. But it does raise the issue not just of how valid this analysis was, but how valid class analysis in general is, even when applied in such an insightful way as was the case in this book.

Perhaps the most delightful thing about this book is its wonderfully ironic style. The authors have a witty way of making their points. For example, "In the bourgeois democracies public opinion would see in a loss of the workers' vote a repudiation of the axiom that 'the Communist Party is the party of the working class' – a petty, positivistic conclusion from the standpoint of the logic of rational redistribution. The Communist parties that have come to power have made it their first order of business to free themselves from the obligation, so unworthy of their historic mission, of participating in the vote-getting carnival of bourgeois-democratic elections."[37] "Elections become grand but still heartfelt demonstrations of the unity of the toiling masses. The candidates share the proud good humor of their electors, for in these festive rites of substantive democracy they, unlike the candidates in the formal democracies cannot lose their seats."[38] Such examples could be multiplied. They add immeasurably to the impact of the book.

The authors' ironic style is reminiscent of that great classic by Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. There are in fact substantive links between these two works that go beyond style. When Veblen speaks of leisure, of course, he does not refer to indolence. "What [leisure] connotes," he says, "is non-productive use of time."[39] The redistributive economy provides countless examples of this kind of leisure. The endless committee meetings, rallies, indoctrination efforts and the like conspicuously show one's willingness to

participate in the intellectual class by expending prodigious amounts of non-productive time. The elites have an even more decorous and honorific way to demonstrate their ability to spend time in non-productive activities through interminable party conferences, ritualistic television appearances, visiting factories, contentless speeches, and so forth, all of which fall under what Veblen calls "the great economic law of wasted effort."[40] They satisfy the need of the elites to reach out, once again in Veblen's language, for "some form of [apparently] purposeful activity that. . . at the same time [is] not indecorously productive. . .."[41] Veblen's point is that for the public persona of the leadership "to be reputable, it must be wasteful,"[42] a condition amply displayed by the activities of the elites in the redistributive economy.

In the capitalist world, Veblen says, "esteem is gained and dispraise is avoided by putting one's efficiency in evidence."[43] This is true of what Konrád and Szelényi call the technocracy. But, as they point out, while pure efficiency may be a refuge for some, it is not the criterion by which social decisions are made in the redistributive economy. Instead they are made through reciprocal relations of clientage. Even though the technocrats often justify their decisions to the public and even perhaps to themselves on the basis of rationality and efficiency, they actually make what adjustments appear needed to retain the favor of the elites, whatever the actual efficiency of the decision might be. This ordinary human propensity to interpret situations in ways that will please one's superiors is raised to a structural element in redistributive economies. The elites on their side can and do protect their clients, often without regard to efficiency, while at the same time enjoying the perquisites of conspicuous consumption they believe befit their position – the black chauffeured car, the special stores, the trip abroad. Even those at lower levels engage in similar conspicuous consumption if they are able, however inefficient the actual work involved – the truck driver who, as Konrád and Szelényi mention, feels he must have a helper to lift the packages onto the truck because he did not go to the trouble of specialized training to be a truck driver to do such unskilled labor. Veblen comments: "Labor acquires a character of irksomeness by virtue of the indignity imputed to it."[44] However, as Veblen goes on to say, and as Konrád and Szelényi would affirm, the assertion of the greater honorability of truck driving, or at a higher level, of intellectual work, "is in the last analysis little if anything else than a recognized successful act of aggression."[45] And how is this honor gained in the redistributive

economy? Not, as in Veblen's case, through the accumulation of wealth, but rather by the accumulation of intellectual merit points, the degrees, certifications, and party schools, as well as, most of all, by the ample demonstration of loyalty to the leadership. Those who are successful in this become thought of as omni-competent, deemed able to run a factory, a university department, or a government office. Having achieved such a position, the successful individual is in a position to begin dispensing favors and finding ways to emphasize his (usually not her) lofty position through honorific displays. It is not property that is the "most easily recognized evidence of a reputable degree of success"[46] in the redistributive economy, nor is it the condition of being an intellectual in itself that grants such a status, but the position of leadership itself.

Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power focuses on the redistributive economy, that is, on Soviet-style systems. It is quite obvious why this is so. Nevertheless, the assumption on which these economies operated – that human beings could discover and implement rational, even scientific, methods of social engineering for society's benefit – was part and parcel of a larger system of modern thought that James C. Scott calls "high modernism."[47] Scott argues that an ideology of rational scientism characterizes not only the Soviet and East European communist experience, but the entire twentieth-century world. High modernists create, or perhaps are used by, states that attempt, through various controls on the population, to make all aspects of the society transparent to those in power. Scott uses the Soviet experience as one of his case studies, but he also uses others, such as Brasilia, the completely planned but dead city, and "villagization" in Tanzania, which destroyed an unkempt but vital village culture in favor of unproductive and sterile geometrically modeled living quarters. The redistributors justified the imposition of their impractical but intellectually attractive abstractions on societies by professing an ideology that valorized a scientific and logical, but actually ideological, world view. Konrád and Szelényi's ironic stance fits well into the twentieth century's greatest irony–by imposing an ideology they believed would bring benefits and well being, the high modernists actually caused enormous suffering and hardship. In other words, the phenomena that are the central empirical data from which Konrád and Szelényi were working are characteristic of a certain kind of approach to the world that pervaded the twentieth century, and was not exclusively an East European concern.

The ironies of intellectuals on the road to power, or not[48]

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The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power was the single most important book for me during my graduate school days, and was decisive for my dissertation and my first book.[49] Within my discipline, Ivan Szelényi himself has been one of the most, if not the most, important sociologist working on East European social structures and social transformations. For these two reasons, I am especially delighted to contribute to this discussion on the book's place twenty-five years later, but not only for nostalgia's sake. By focusing intensively on *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (hereafter *The Intellectuals*) and one of its authors we can learn much about knowledge cultures during and after communism, within and beyond Eastern Europe.

This ambition led me to break one of the rules my colleagues followed more honorably than I for the symposium that led to this publication. While I focus on *The Intellectuals*, I also attend to subsequent assessments of its significance. I draw especially heavily on a videotaped interview I conducted with Ivan in 1994,[50] which itself provides the best place to start: the conditions enabling the writing, and reception, of *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*.

Conditions of *The Intellectuals'* initial recognition

Ivan recalled the conditions leading to the book's production. I draw out three:

1. It was easy to be a critical social thinker under communist rule because there were so many taboos; to be labeled innovative and critical, one need only mark taboos.
2. Social conditions encouraged this critical disposition: the coffee shop and party scene encouraged the intellectually ambitious to radicalize ideas.
3. This radicalization always had an edge, however, for one was never sure exactly what would be the result of these ideas, and whether those who cheered you on one day would avoid you the next.

There was, however, the larger social environment that complicated these issues still further. As Ivan watched the affinities of colleagues

ebb and flow, everyone was watching what was happening elsewhere, notably in the Soviet Union. At the very time of writing *The Intellectuals*, communist authorities had already expelled Aleksander Solzhenitysn from his homeland. Although the Hungarian conditions seemed much more open, alternative futures were quite apparent to Ivan: for this book, the authorities could imprison him, force him into exile, or at least fire him as a researcher, forcing on him a political future rather than the academic one he anticipated.

To be sure, this risk helped to make this book politically significant in the West, but its analytical distinction was more important for its academic reception. My symposium colleagues have commented on the importance we analysts of Soviet-type societies attributed to immanent critiques, for they suggested a way out of the seduction into the intellectually dubious and politically risky idealization of one system used to criticize another.[51] This book was different from other such critiques, however, because it also offered such a well-argued and strong thesis: in communist-led systems, superior teleological knowledge, rather than property ownership per se, guarantees the right to dispose of society's surplus. Hence, to gain the right the bourgeoisie enjoys by virtue of its property ownership, one must have "specialized knowledge" and hence, be some kind of intellectual to become part of the ruling class in what Konrád and Szelényi called "rational redistributive systems" (p. 46).[52]

Substantially documented strong theses accompanied by political risk tend to make books popular, but the book became additionally appealing in Western sociology because of how it sat neatly between the two dominant styles of the day. On the one hand, this book used Marxist analysis and invoked a class critique that made it resonate with the critical orientation of much of Western sociology. On the other hand, it was also appealing to the Weberian inclination to avoid putting scholarship directly in the service of politics in its attempt to describe the system as it was, in what Ivan said later was relatively "value neutral."

Finally, *The Intellectuals* also became significant because it came out at a time that Western sociology was itself infatuated with the new class and intellectuals. In part, this was a reflection of 1968, where the baby boomer rebellions birthed a whole series of reflections on intellectual responsibility and power. Alvin Gouldner was the leading sociologist working on this,[53] but there were others, and this book fit in marvelously, then, with a larger series that was not quite Marxist, but

like the spirit of *Theory and Society*, quite critical. This was apparent in Ivan's introduction to the English language version of *The Intellectuals* (p. xvi) but it was also exemplified by the publication of Ivan's synthetic article in *Marxist Inquiries*,[54] the essay in a special *American Journal of Sociology* supplement. Sociologists thus read *The Intellectuals*, and Ivan's work through a lens that found his class analysis and critique of intellectuals resonant with a larger current of critical sociology.

The Intellectuals had a third quality, however, that Western sociology hardly appreciated, but nevertheless was critical to its East European resonance and its renewed significance: the irony in which it was bathed. Before this symposium, I expected to make an original contribution with this emphasis, but as this collection of papers suggests, most of us found irony to be a major, if not central quality, of the work's value. However, we don't locate irony in the same place, nor is it apparent why it's so obviously important today. I shall conclude my remarks with a few preliminary reflections on irony's importance in our academic and public culture today, but begin with a subject I feel more confident: the sub-disciplinary focus that made the book resonate so powerfully with Western sociology in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The ironic sociology of intellectuals

A critical sociology of intellectuals, by intellectuals, is, in the end, necessarily and deeply, ironic, and becomes better to the extent it marks that irony not only explicitly but also with charm. Konrád and Szelényi succeeded at both. Consider, for instance,

> The intellectuals, in other words, did not think of themselves as an intelligentsia; they identified with the social class or group from which they sprang or whose interests they expressed. They fell into the same ironic trap of historical self-projection as did those bourgeois revolutionaries, the Jacobins who thought themselves the spokesman of the whole people (p. 72).
>
> Thus the lucky groups of intellectuals whom the administrators of research work select to harness to their expensive equipment come increasingly to feel their alienation from research which is imposed on them from above and which, by reason of its high degree of specialization, can no longer be comprehended in its entirety. . . (p. 78). We might say that they wished to preserve the intellectual character of their labor power, rather than see themselves reduced to mere owners of labor-power. To put it more ironically, they wished to preserve their character of owners of a special kind of capital (p. 79).
>
> We must confess that for Eastern European intellectuals the temptation to forge ahead on forbidden paths is very strong. Imagine an ardent hunter who

> after prowling around for ages in potato fields suddenly stumbles onto a game preserve whose keepers have not allowed anyone in living memory to hunt or even photograph the game. He can be certain that even without a crack rifle and a peerless eye he can still acquire there trophies which will give him the reputation of a matchless nimrod and make him the toast of every field-and-stream show. Similarly, the intellectual who sets out to explore the reservation of ideological taboos is drawn to forbidden territory not so much by an indominatable heroism which shrinks from no dangers by the prospect of an easy bag, and by the reward not only of the abstract joy of intellectual discovery but of domestic and even international acclaim for his original achievement (pp. 237–238).

Here, then, is the powerful tension within this work, one that makes irony central to its social science. Intellectuals are prone to write powerful critiques of what is, implying what ought to be, erasing their own self-interest in that projection. This self-interest is extended under state socialism, potentially leading to the class rule of the intelligentsia, but only to the extent that one dimension of that intellectual work – those who know better should decide the allocation of the system's surplus – defines dominance. In this system, intellectual autonomy declines, and intellectual taboos proliferate, increasing the value of ideas themselves. Talk about irony!

While this point is well known,[55] using it to think about the book's significance is not so common. The contradictoriness of intellectual value under communist rule could appear to reduce the significance of the book itself. Is this book great only because it says something that is taboo? Of course the book's erudition and insight are obvious, as Katherine Verdery emphasizes in this symposium, but this very doubt becomes part of the book's ironic charm. Sociologists hardly acknowledged this charm in their reception of it, however, in part because of the times in which it was received. Now, however, we would do well to develop this side of this work's value, something Ivan himself has emphasized for at least the last decade.

During his 1994 interview, I asked Ivan about the relations between his own trajectories of intellectual development and the social transformations through which he lived. Under state socialism, he said, things did not change much. When he left in 1975 and came back for the first time in 1982, things had not changed significantly, or at least they had not changed in ways that he would not have otherwise expected. In the mid-1990s, by contrast, things were changing so rapidly, and in such unexpected ways, that it was hard to have the same feeling or the same confidence that one understood the changes. Opening Eastern

Europe to a global professional sociology did not produce the same intellectual confidence, nor did it produce the same kind of intellectual consequence, at least in the conventional terms we think about intellectuals. This, too, is a large irony.

Nonetheless, *The Intellectuals* continued to provide an important foundation for research. Indeed, one might argue that it became a classic in the literature around the formation of the new class. It certainly provided an important foundation for *Making Capitalism without Capitalists*.[56] Based on a theory of the fourth new class project of the East Central European intelligentsia, Ivan and his coauthors explain social change in terms of the patterned attributes of economic, political, and cultural elites at different points of time. They especially focused on Hungary but to some extent took Poland, the Czech Republic, and to a much lesser extent but for stark contrast, Russia, into account. Their sense of capitalism was based on the qualities of these agents and their theorized relationships to others, primarily within their class. In this sense, *The Intellectuals* is not only a classic, but a living influence on the theory of social transformations in postcommunist societies, making intellectuals the abiding subject through which we can understand social transformations.

This work and the subsequent professional sociological interpretation of *The Intellectuals* appear closer to Ivan's conscious representation of his scholarship than to what was imputed to him during communist rule in Hungary. Ivan has identified himself as Weberian, on the one hand, emphasizing that our conceptual tools are always inadequate before the complexities of reality, thereby only capturing what our values lead us to recognize as important to address. He also self-identifies as populist, in preferring the viewpoint on reality that is from the bottom, from the underdog. Although he has focused on elites and intellectuals, his interpretation of them rarely squares simply with their own self-understanding and is more likely to be something plausible according to those who are the beneficiaries, or victims, of their power. There are, however, two dilemmas in this.

First, while these are portraits of intellectuals and elites, they are also portraits of systems that might be understood through these positions, albeit viewed from below. In this sense, the Marxist resonance remains apparent, but flipped on its head: instead of recognizing the future with the universal class at the bottom, we rest on understanding the present by studying the ruling class we apparently wish to see *in statu nascendi*.

This flirts with Marxism, therefore, but retreats from its ambition to present the "real mechanisms" by its emphasis on the multiple valences of social structure. We can see that disposition much more clearly after communism than before it. And it fits with our own professional social science, where we are invited to debate and "test" hypotheses that Ivan and his colleagues have developed.

That Weberian humility was hard to recognize in the communist period, however, for in those times the intellectual as hero, and as critical social analyst, was more than someone offering a few hypotheses on the system. It was, much more like Marxism, a knowledge culture that was rooted in practice, demonstrating its consequence with political reaction. That, in turn, made it difficult for Ivan to radicalize his ideas without either leaving or becoming an opposition figure. He left, and became the professional sociologist. Konrád stayed, and he became the opposition figure.

We all could live vicariously with that communist era tension, but the heroic choices leave out the ironies that make *The Intellectuals* ultimately so special. It charmed those who could recognize the irony, but more important, perhaps, it made those, including the political police, worried that they would not get it, and therefore obliged to figure out what they had to do with a couple of chaps at work in Csobanka. That, in the end, might be the difference on which we need to focus in order to appreciate *The Intellectuals* not only as an important work of social science, but also as a dramatic reflection of a lost world in which ideas appeared to have consequence before brute force.

Elevating irony in critical social science

During the symposium, Ivan pointed out that our recognition of irony was quite appropriate. In fact, he said, he and his coauthors had recently written a paper on how irony lies at the epistemological foundation of his oeuvre, but the mainstream sociology journal to which it was initially submitted declined to publish it. A journal more accustomed to critical theory's elaboration published it subsequently.[57] It is tough to capture in print the audience's reception of this fine point, but most appreciated how irony might be used to illuminate irony's own place in professional social science. However, the irony at work in *Thesis Eleven* did not have the same critical power as I found in *The Intellectuals*.

In 2003, Ivan and his colleagues put irony in the place of socialism's counterculture.[58] While they acknowledged humor's importance, the main place irony occupied was in absolution from responsibility for identifying a positive normative standpoint from which to develop critical sociology. In this, socialism's demise and globalization's hegemony become almost a relief for critical intellectuals, released from the obligatory defense or critique of societies made in the name of their allegiance. Nonetheless, irony's revival is especially apparent in the assessment of the fourth new class project.

Reflecting on *Making Capitalism without Capitalists*, Ivan and his colleagues find intellectuals to be a particularly flawed class. While Gouldner may have evaluated their flaw in terms of their distance from universality,[59] the intellectuals' flaw in Eyal et al. ("On Irony") comes in their failure to hold onto power once they get it. Using their capacity for rational discourse as the means by which they construct capitalism,[60] much as they once constructed socialism, this East European intelligentsia loses its distinction, or its power, as soon as it has the capacity to realize it. Cultural capital might be good in collective approximation for Weber's charismatic authority, but it surely is not enough to sustain class power in capitalism. Irony is certainly here, but not quite like it was in *The Intellectuals*.

On rereading irony's power in *The Intellectuals* I find something more than the recognition of others' points of view, the irrelevance of a positive normative standpoint, the significance of critique, or even the appeal of that wry smile. I rather notice its power, and not just its feasibility. Irony's wittiness is seditious; its engagement implies an intellectual superiority that makes uncertain authorities nervous and apprehensive. That kind of irony has no place in professional social science, or at least no explicit place. Irony also has had little place in the public culture of America and its most recent expression of imperial globalization, but not because intellectuals do not have a place.

Nostalgia motivates our appreciation for *The Intellectuals* because it reminds us of a time when intellectual authority and power was so great that we might debate whether intellectuals were on the road to power. But it was appealing not only because it was a worry, but also because we could be proud that ideas were considered potentially dangerous, and therefore consequential. Maybe Konrád and Szelényi were just lucky to be living in a system where there were so many taboos, but

those in the West were also lucky, for ideas appeared to matter during communist rule regardless of where we lived.

Ideas clearly still matter. The ideology that has led the United States to relatively unilateralist positions in ambitious plans to refashion the world in its image, whether you agree with the ambition or not, is clearly rooted in the ascendance of a particular intellectual culture that James Mann has labeled "Vulcan."[61] But the mood is quite different, and here, I think, it is because of the space afforded critical intellectuality and the conditions of their consequence.

The difference between Hungary in the 1970s and the United States after 9/11 may be that these neoconservative intellectuals in U.S. power are not the lions Ivan imagined in the game preserve.[62] Instead, and with all due apologies to Pareto's theory of elite circulation, those in power today are foxes. They do not simply defend power; they know how to get it and to outwit their adversaries. They are so accustomed to, and prepared for, critique that they have made ideas beyond their ken irrelevant and their own relatively unassailable. The occasional irony of the isolated intellectual is not quite enough to produce the confidence about the importance of ideas unattached to power. But the cumulation of irony might be quite important, so long as its conditions of consequence are kept in mind.

Konrád and Szelényi had coffee houses, but no matter how many Starbucks franchises appear in college towns, they don't quite match the power of Budapest's communist-era New York Café. Just like the proliferation of latte, America is overwhelmed with a cacophony of public opinion registered in chat rooms across the Internet, and for the less digitally devoted, a plethora of pundits on talk shows from radio to television. An occasional opinion piece hints at the abiding appeal of satire,[63] but irony is certainly not enough unless we think about the social conditions that make it significant.

The conditions of public discourse in commercialized media and fragmented Internet culture require critique of consequence to be connected to outrageousness, not to the subtlety found in irony. Bluster is better, demanding only notice, not a sophistication that recognizes an intellectual's disrespect. Perhaps we should welcome those who wish to constrain academic expression – indeed, those who would monitor professors for their expressions of intellectual diversity might, ironically,

raise the value of ideas as they seek to limit them with harassments of various sorts. But this, it seems, is guerilla intellectual war on the sidelines, distractions from the real contests over the exercise of power, designed to focus the contest on pseudo-academic values while making the real debates ever more distant from intellectual engagement. With this combination of aggressiveness and marginalization in the world of ideas, I wonder, then, whether Ivan is really writing the sequels to his own book of twenty-five years ago as he develops the sociology of intellectuals on the road to class power. With all due apologies, I might even speculate that Michael Moore is the Ivan Szelényi of our times, and *Dude, Where's My Country*[64] is the real sequel to *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*.

After I suggested this in the forum, Michael Bernhard suggested that I should look well beyond Michael Moore. After all, Comedy Central's Daily Show host Jon Stewart might be closer to irony's power under communism with his satirical wit and television reach to rock the vote. Or maybe I should look more closely at Al Franken's acerbic style for a better comparison. Neither Stewart nor Franken has Moore's populist affect, however, nor can they make those who rule blink the way Moore tries to do. Maybe it is just loyalty to a native son of Michigan, but Moore represents something more dangerous than either of his comrade critical humorists, and therefore a bit more like those intellectuals in the ideological game reserves Konrád and Szelényi described.

Moore offends with directness, whether in his disregard for the etiquette of the Academy Awards ceremony or in the bluntness of his charges about presidential incompetence or irresponsibility and what may lie behind it. It was tough enough before 9/11 to develop irony's significance in the cacophony of commercialism's public sphere and the fragmentation of the Internet's public discourse, but with war, the plausibility of irony as a critical discourse becomes almost pathetic. Moore predicts, "for the next year, leading up to the 2004 election, all you are going to hear from Bush is how there is a war going on, a war on terror, a war to liberate and rebuild Iraq, a war against Iranian clerics, a war against North Korean nuclear madmen, a war against Colombian drug lords, a war against extremism, a war against Communism in Cuba, a war against Hamas, a war against. . .. And to maintain endless war, they need endless fear, a fear that can only be extended indefinitely by taking away our basic civil rights." (pp. 102–103). Look, for example, at the stampede to approve the Patriot Act, which Moore finds to be a "gross misnomer," identifying

it as “un-American as *Mein Kampf*” (p. 104). This is not irony; this is on the edge of libel, but it might also be the only form of critique that can be heard in cacophonic capitalism mobilized around fear.

Jacobs and Smith rightly point out that a culture that cultivates ironic reflection also contributes to the subversion of “totalizing conformist discourses by deflating pretensions and deconstructing assumptions about putatively common interests and realities.”[65] It is hard to see that irony in Moore because he is so in your face, in their face, but it is also there in his self-deprecation and incredulous disbelief that his America could be their America. His aggressive playfulness suggests the very carnivalesque in public discourse Jacobs and Smith invite in the invigoration of societal reflexivity. But it has to be on full volume to be noticed. And that is a long way from Csobanka. America today certainly has more than its share of ironists, but even with their multiplication it hardly seems that any consequent reflexivity will have an effect unless it blasts through the media like a storm. Moore knows how to get that center stage, while Szelényi hardly imagined this work being celebrated as a classic when working with Konrád in their little dacha back in Csobanka. But I also wonder if we might look back, twenty-five years from now, wondering what made Moore so prescient, and wondering how it was that irony on steroids contributed to the undoing of intellectuals on the road to empire – or not. By the time this appears in print, we should know.

Notes

1. Alec Nove, “George Konrád and Ivan Szelényi: *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power: A Sociological Study of the Role of Intellectuals in Socialism*,” *Telos* 44 (1980): 225–233.
2. Václav Havel et al., in John Keane, editor, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (London: Hutchinson, 1985).
3. Milan Šimecka, *The Restoration of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia, 1969–1976*, translated by A. G. Brian (London: Verso, 1984).
4. Marc Rakovski, *Towards an East European Marxism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978).
5. Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity, and Intellectuals* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).
6. Konrád and Szelényi, *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, 28–29.
7. Indeed, I found their definition of intellectuals so useful that I employed it subsequently in my work. See Katherine Verdery, “Theorizing Socialism: A Prologue to the ‘Transition,’” *American Ethnologist* 18 (1991): 419–439; *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu’s Romania* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

8. Nove, "George Konrád and Ivan Szelényi"; Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Road of the Intellectuals to Class Power: A Sociological Study of the Intelligentsia in Socialism, by George Konrád and Iván Szelényi," *The New Republic* 182 (1980): 28–32.
9. György Márkus, "The Functioning of the System: Conflicts and Perspectives," chapter 3 in Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller, and György Márkus, editors, *Dictatorship over Needs* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).
10. Ivan Szelényi, "The Prospects and Limits of the East European New Class Project: An Auto-Critical Reflection in *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*," *Politics and Society* 15 (1986–1987): 102–144.
11. *Intellectuals*, 225.
12. Pavel Campeanu, *The Genesis of the Stalinist Social Order*, special issue of *International Journal of Sociology* 18 (1988).
13. Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
14. *Intellectuals*, 222, emphasis added.
15. Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).
16. Campeanu The Genesis; Márkus, "The Functioning"; János Kornai, *Economics of Shortage* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishers, 1980). The original formulation of my argument was written in 1988 – thus, before the collapse of socialism.
17. Konrád and Szelényi, *Intellectuals*, 4.
18. Ibid., 147–148. The translation uses intellectuals to describe the class as a whole in Konrád and Szelényi's analysis. They reserve the term "intelligentsia" for only the last of these three components. I follow this convention throughout this comment.
19. Ibid., 207.
20. Ibid., 152, 159–160.
21. In the Czechlands, the indigenous nobility was exceptionally weak following its near destruction, conquest, and replacement by the Habsburgs. The Czech national revival of the nineteenth century was led by an intelligentsia whose origins lay in the rise of the Czech bourgeoisie. See Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chapters 3–4.
22. The position of the reformist intelligentsia in the Czechlands was perhaps even stronger in the 1960s when they were the motivating force behind the Prague Spring. The post-1968 repression strongly targeted these circles. See Milan Šimečka, *The Restoration of Order***:** *the Normalization of Czechoslovakia, 1969–1976* (London: Verso, 1984). In Poland, the relation between the party elite and the intelligentsia took a radically different trajectory from that in Hungary. Initially after the Polish October of 1956, Gomulka opted to favor orthodox rather than revisionist elements in the party. A widening split between the party elite and critical elements in the party emerged over Kuroń and Modzelewski's *Open Letter to the Party* in 1964 [*List otwarty do partii*. (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1966)], the repression of the critical student movement of 1968, and the exile of many leading revisionists. From this juncture the Polish critical intelligentsia pursued politics outside the framework of the party, which had serious ramifications for the nature of politics there.
23. For a more in depth comparison of post-crisis normalization strategies in the three countries, see Grzegorz Ekiert, *The State against Society: Political Crises and their Aftermath in East Central Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
24. This included the repression of Konrád and Szelényi as well as the marginalization and emigration of most of the senior members of the Budapest School of critical Marxists, see Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 124.
25. Although in certain areas of the region, it never had very much developmental utility, i.e., in East Germany, Bohemia and Moravia, or Silesia.

26. See Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Glove: Artists under Socialism* (New York: Basic Books, 1987) for a detailed consideration of the dilemmas of overt versus self-censorship with the relaxation and disappearance of formal censorship.
27. In pondering this, I wondered when the analyses presented in the book began to lose its relevance for analysis of the concrete problems of the region. My sense is that this came with the repression of Solidarity in 1981, and with it, hopes for any further reform of the system. In my first conversation with Iván Szelényi, I asked him about what the Solidarity experience and the reemergence of civil society in Poland meant for the arguments they had made in *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*. He answered that he felt the arguments were still valid, that Polish intellectuals had done exactly what they argued marginal intellectuals needed to do, in the last part of their book – push for broader freedoms while arguing that it was in the general interest of the society as a whole. The question remains as to whether if Solidarity had not been suppressed in 1981, the economic reforms it had proposed would have stabilized the system in Poland and improved the class position of the intellectuals.
28. Maria Hirszowicz, *The Bureaucratic Leviathan: a Study in the Sociology of Communism* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 16–20.
29. Kenneth Jowitt, "Soviet Neotraditionalism: The Political Corruption of a Leninist Regime," *Soviet Studies* 35/3 (1983): 275–297.
30. Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," *World Politics* 49/2 (1997): 155–183.
31. Andrew Janos, *East-Central Europe in the Modern World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
32. Of course, present day Slovakia is hardly monocultural and all of these societies contain large numbers of uncounted or miscounted Roma and Sinti.
33. Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
34. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 403, 412.
35. Konrád and Szelényi, *Intellectuals*, 147.
36. Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957).
37. Konrád and Szelényi, *Intellectuals*, 162.
38. Ibid., 163.
39. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: New American Library, 1953 [1899]), 44.
40. Ibid., 69.
41. Ibid., 76.
42. Ibid., 77.
43. Ibid., 30.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 37.
47. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
48. I [Kennedy] wish to thank both my colleagues in the symposium audience, especially Krzysztof Jasiewicz, and my colleagues on the panel for their help in formulating these ideas, and for their greater contribution in the enduring inspiration for envisioning intellectuals of consequence. I am especially grateful to Michael Bernhard, who invited me to participate and who provided strong leadership in the production of this collection.
49. Michael D. Kennedy, *Professionals, Power and Solidarity in Poland: A Critical Sociology of Soviet-type Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
50. Interview with Ivan Szelényi, Advanced Study Center series on the Cold War and Its Aftermath, 1994, International Institute, University of Michigan.

51. See, for example, Gerhard Lenski, "Marxist Experiments in Destratification: An Appraisal," *Social Forces* 57 (1978): 364–383.
52. I draw on Kennedy, *Professionals*, 148.
53. Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979).
54. "The Intelligentsia in the Class Structure of State-Socialist Societies," in M. Burawoy and T. Skocpol, editors, *Marxist Inquiries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 287–326.
55. These are themes of my earlier work – see for instance, Michael D. Kennedy, "The Intelligentsia in the Constitution of Civil Societies and Post-Communist Regimes in Hungary and Poland," *Theory and Society* 21/1 (1992): 29–76; "Eastern Europe"s Lessons for Critical Intellectuals," in Charles Lemert, editor, *Intellectuals and Politics: Social Theory in a Changing World.* Key Issues in Sociological Theory v. 5, (Sage Press, 1992), 94–112; and "The Constitution of Critical Intellectuals: Polish Physicians, Peace Activists and Democratic Civil Society," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 23/3–4 (1990): 281–304 and the larger set of essays in Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy, editors, *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).
56. Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelényi, and Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism without Capitalists: The New Ruling Elites in Eastern Europe* (London: Verso, 1998).
57. Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelényi, and Eleanor Townsley, "On Irony: An Invitation to Neoclassical Sociology," *Thesis Eleven* 73 (2003): 5–41.
58. As Zygmunt Bauman famously identified its place: *Socialism: The Active Utopia* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976).
59. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals.*
60. Charles Derber, William A. Schwartz, and Yale Magrass, *Power in the Highest Degree: Professionals and the Rise of a New Mandarin Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) might thereby provide a better foundation for argument with their emphasis on the culture of rational discourse.
61. Drawing here on James Mann, *The Rise of the Vulcans: A History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004).
62. He identified the animals in his interview, whereas the book only identified game on pp. 237–238.
63. The latest in this writing is Larry David's expression of appreciation for President Bush's elevation of National Guard sacrifice during the Viet Nam War. See "My War," *The New York Times* 4 (February 15, 2004): 11.
64. Michael Moore, *Dude*, *Where's My Country?* (New York: Warner, 2003).
65. Ronald N. Jacobs and Philip Smith, "Romance, Irony and Solidarity," *Sociological Theory* 15/1 (1997): 60–80, 70.