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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the impact of autonomous groups — independent of state-sponsorship — on communist East Europe and the role they played in the initial period of transformation from communist to multi-party systems. It was assumed, in years past, that such groups could do little, if anything, to alter the structure of power in Marxist-Leninist societies. Yet, by the late 1980s, their role, initially as destabilizing agents under communism and later as the stabilizing forces of transition, could not be denied.

This study examines, first, the manner in which the structural barriers to independent group activity were eroded, circumvented or destroyed in communist East Europe, as well as the manner in which the bases of autonomous group operations were constructed through the mobilization of resources.

Second, an analysis is provided on the various functions served by these groups and the ways in which they shook the foundations of the communist socio-political structures, while providing a forum for the training of alternative political leaders.

Third, various aspects of the construction of a power base by autonomous groups are discussed, including (a) the establishment of credibility in East and West; (b) the use of accountability as a method of eroding the legitimacy of the communist state; (c) the use of unconventional avenues for the articulation of interest by East European autonomous groups; and (d) the changing balance of power between autonomous groups and the communist ruling elite.

Finally, an analysis is provided of the types of roles played by the autonomous groups in individual East European countries during the tumultuous changes of 1989 and the manner in which these groups, once destabilizing agents in communist East Europe, became the stabilizing forces of the new order.

An interview with Lech Walesa on human rights in Poland on March 27, 1987, is appended.
INTRODUCTION

Common wisdom of years past focused on the impossibility of change from below in Marxist-Leninist societies. There were many reasons for this negative evaluation, all of which underlined the existing barriers that precluded independent action on the part of non-elites (i.e., those citizens outside the circles of the ruling elite), the absence of institutionalized means for non-elites to bring about change, and their lack of power. Yet the decade of the 1980s proved that autonomous groups, independent of state sponsorship and thus technically illegal under the Marxist-Leninist order, could and did emerge, pursued goals independent of state directives and hence contrary to the wishes of the ruling elite, and in some cases achieved those goals in East European communist systems.

Some of these autonomous groups, such as Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia or the semi-autonomous peace groups that operated in the German Democratic Republic under the aegis of the Protestant Churches, had been in continuous existence since the late 1970s. Others, such as Poland's Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity, had their legal status withdrawn in 1981 and were pushed underground for most of the decade, only to reemerge and take over the reigns of government through the first partially free, democratically held elections in the region in more than forty years. Of the countless other autonomous groups that emerged in Eastern Europe during the 1980s, by far most were established in the latter part of the decade as a direct result of changes in the opportunity structure brought about by Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of reform in the Soviet Union and by the ultimate withdrawal of the Brezhnev Doctrine.

While much has been written about dissent and opposition in communist
states, there is virtually no body of literature that addresses the socio-
political impact of the oxymoronic phenomenon of autonomous groups in
Marxist-Leninist systems. The present report hopes to begin to fill this
gap by reevaluating (1) those barriers in Marxist-Leninist systems that
were said to preclude the formation of autonomous groups and independent
action on the part of non-elites in Eastern Europe; (2) the notion that
non-elites were unable to bring about meaningful and lasting change in
these societies because they lacked the institutionalized means to do
so; and (3) the notion that citizens who lacked both the resources and
the institutionalized means to bring about change were powerless over
their circumstances.

Autonomous groups refer to a form of voluntary association in that
they were created by their memberships and functioned outside the
sponsorship of the state. They differed from many voluntary associations
in the West in that their members formed more of a "community" (with
respect to personal bonds) than an "organization" (where ties are more
impersonal). They had identifiable memberships, clearly defined goals,
and some measure of organizational cohesion. It is precisely these
characteristics that distinguished them from other forms of opposition,
such as letter-writing campaigns or petitions and resolutions signed and
sponsored by an ad hoc gathering of individuals. To be sure, all of these
other forms of collective behavior have had and will continue to have
their place in the evolutionary development of opposition in a new Eastern
Europe. On their own, however, they do not reflect the more advanced
stages of this evolution — namely the organization of autonomous groups.

Only those groups whose purpose was to initiate change in society
are examined here, thus excluding clubs whose sole purpose was social or hobby-oriented. Many of the autonomous groups discussed in this analysis existed illegally and operated at various levels of the underground, while others, though illegal, operated above-ground. In addition, the Gorbachev phenomenon broadened the scope of the types of organizations some states, namely Poland and Hungary, were willing to accommodate, even prior to the changes that swept the region in late 1989, either through legal registration or through tacit approval that lacked any official recognition. Such autonomous groups, incorporated into the official and semi-official socio-political landscape, were also a major component of the push for change from below in Eastern Europe.

Six countries are included in this discussion: Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria and Romania. The analysis begins with an examination of the barriers built into Marxist-Leninist systems that were intended to prevent the emergence of autonomous groups and independently initiated activity. A reevaluation follows of the barriers that, by the late 1970s, were no longer effective in some East European societies in precluding grassroots organization. What happened to the barriers? How were they circumvented or destroyed? How did previously "atomized" individuals manage to come together to pursue a common cause; how did they establish the bases of their operations and find the resources necessary to build their structures?

A second section of the analysis describes the functions these autonomous groups served once they were established. Attention is given to both the direct and indirect consequences of the illegal activities of such independent groups in closed societies and the extent to which
they managed to destabilize the region throughout the decade and to lay the foundations for changes that were to take place in the final months of 1989.

Part three is devoted to the issue of power. It describes the manner in which autonomous groups altered the structure of power in some East European countries and examines how the introduction of the notion of accountability changed the equation. While this new balance of power was not necessarily to the clear advantage of these groups, it was undoubtedly tipped to the disadvantage of the existing ruling elite. Furthermore, this section includes an analysis of the manner in which power and legitimacy were established by the autonomous groups of Eastern Europe. It also examines the non-institutional or unconventional channels used by autonomous groups in the articulation of their demands, as well as a description of the extent to which these groups were able to successfully construct their own institutions to serve their organizational goals.

Finally, part four examines the role played by autonomous groups in the tumultuous changes that swept Eastern Europe in 1989. It provides examples of the ways in which these groups facilitated the mobilization of mass protests during the final months of that year, as well as an analysis of the roles they played in launching their countries into new, more democratic systems of government. Special attention is paid to the stabilizing effect some of these groups were able to have during the initial months of the transformations their countries underwent and compares the situation in countries with a long and extensive history of autonomous group activity to that in those with virtually none.
THE BARRIERS TO INDEPENDENT ACTION AND THEIR DESTRUCTION

While no socio-political system can completely fulfill its own "ideal-type" requirements, it is important to consider its ultimate goals when evaluating the real and potential impact it has on society as a whole. In Marxist-Leninist systems, the barriers to independent action are constructed through a comprehensive ideology and elaborate state policies aimed at atomizing citizens, destroying communities, and controlling the resources necessary for independent action. Punishment for taking part in independent activities -- outside the direct sponsorship of the state and therefore "contrary" to its interests -- include expulsion from the country, internal exile, lengthy prison sentences, expulsion from one's profession, or payment of exorbitant fines aimed at ruining a person's life financially. Such punishments were enforced to varying degrees in all Marxist-Leninist countries in Eastern Europe.

In addition, in "ideal-type" Marxist-Leninist systems, the state exercises complete control over all forms of activity in society: political, economic and social. Mass voluntary associations are created and sponsored by the state which, in turn, uses the organizations to communicate its directives and to implement its policies. If approved by an enforced system of registration, other voluntary associations can be established, but only if their goals do not conflict or overlap with those of the mass organizations sponsored by the state. Thus, competition among groups is prevented.²

Through the system of registration, the state controls the resources necessary for the establishment and functioning of voluntary associations. Meeting places, the ability to publicize association goals or to collect
membership dues are all part of the package of benefits given to those organizations that register. Unregistered organizations are, of course, denied all rights and privileges. It is precisely because of decades of the enforcement of such controls over independent activities that non-elites in communist systems were thought to lack both the organizational skills needed to band together for the purpose of achieving a common goal and the expertise necessary to devise a strategy for confronting the ruling elite.

In fact, for decades, these barriers were effective in preventing the establishment of organized, cohesive groups, with well thought-out demands, strategies and goals, as is evidenced in particular by the common pattern of blue-collar opposition in Eastern Europe, spanning the entire period of time from 1953 through 1987. Repeatedly, the scenario began with workers calling a wildcat strike at their enterprises. From their enterprises, they marched to the town square where they were joined by well-wishing onlookers, and then to the local party headquarters to shout anti-communist slogans and wage-related demands. There, as the crowd became enraged at the lack of any response, it stormed the headquarters, destroying the symbols of communism and looting the premises. The security forces or military then broke up the crowds with clubs, water cannon, or guns. While each such incident incorporated its own variation, the similarity of the sequence of events is strikingly similar in Berlin and Pilsen 1953, Poznan 1956, Novocherkassk 1962, Gdansk and Szczecin 1970, Radom 1976, and Brasov 1987. In some cases where workers attempted on their own to establish permanent representation through workers' councils or ongoing strike committees, their efforts were dismantled by
Barriers to independent action also had an impact on patterns of opposition among the intelligentsia. In contrast to the "bread and butter" issues of the working class, the primary concern of the intelligentsia had always been freedom of expression. Not surprisingly, they used the written word as their principal weapon, confronting elites directly through petitions signed by ad hoc gatherings of individuals wishing to participate in a specific action, or through the publication of open-letters in emigre journals. In each case, petitions and letters addressed well-defined issues, often of limited scope, focusing by and large on a particular injustice or grievance, an unfair aspect of the system, or offering advice on how a certain situation should be handled. Rarely was there an official response. Oftentimes, participants were blacklisted and the publication of their professional work was banned. Some, of course, suffered more direct reprisals ranging from outright harassment and physical intimidation to forced expulsion from the country. But rarely were intellectuals punished for their activities with the type of brutality reserved for blue-collar workers and farmers.

When intellectuals formed an organization, it primarily took the form of a discussion club that established limited opportunities for freedom of speech within well-defined circles. The primacy of this organizational form was particularly evident during the period of "the thaw" following the death of Stalin. Beginning in 1955, forums for free discussion, calling themselves the "Crooked Circle Clubs", sprang up throughout Poland. Within a matter of months, 120 such circles came into existence. By 1962, they were officially banned.
Similarly in Hungary in 1956, discussion clubs called the "Petofi Circles" became extremely popular among the intelligentsia, although their expansion and development came to an abrupt halt with the Soviet invasion in October of that year. In both the cases of the "Crooked Circle Clubs" and the "Petofi Circles", the goals of these informal groups did not go beyond discussions of topics not normally open for debate in the wider society — particularly subjects of current political and economic concern. Finally, both in Poland and Hungary, these discussion groups included party members of high rank who were prominent participants in the ensuing discussions.

Dissension within the Writers' Unions was also a characteristic feature of movements for reform in Poland and Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968. During union congresses, writers spoke up vehemently for an end to censorship and the rehabilitation of colleagues who had been blacklisted. Many union members who were prominent as both writers and communists led the campaign for freedom of speech.

By the late 1980s, identical phenomena were occurring in the German Democratic Republic and in Bulgaria. Members of the East German Writers' Union were demanding greater freedom of expression and the publication of the works of previously banned authors. In Bulgaria, at the March 1989 Congress of the Writers' Union, some of the members severely criticized the union leadership for its failure to support glasnost. Principal proponents of the movement for freedom of speech, many of whom were members of the communist party and some of whom were members of new autonomous groups in Bulgaria, were elected to the union leadership.

Although the patterns of opposition that had workers storming the
local communist party headquarters and intellectuals initiating letter-writing campaigns and establishing discussion clubs continued through the 1980s, by the 1970s these were no longer the only patterns of organized opposition in Eastern Europe. During the 1970-71 strikes in Gdansk and Szczecin, Polish workers had returned to their shipyards to stage a sit-down strike, formulating a specific set of demands including the official recognition of their strike committees as permanent representatives. It was also during those strikes that the idea of free trade unions was first articulated. By the late 1970s, free trade union cells arose in Poland with the goal of creating a permanent representative body for the working class that was independent of state sponsorship and control. Intellectuals in Poland and Czechoslovakia established action-oriented autonomous groups with defined memberships and clearly stated goals of an ongoing nature. In the German Democratic Republic, small groups began to form under the aegis of the Protestant churches, pursuing goals of peace and demilitarization. In Hungary, a small group of intellectuals set out to create for themselves a permanent forum for free expression through the creation of an underground press.

The formation of such autonomous groups in communist systems raises two major questions: first, how did previously "atomized" individuals manage to come together to pursue a common cause in opposition to the dictates of the state; and, second, how did they establish the bases of their operations and find the resources necessary to build their structures? In answer to the first question, each of these societies had been a breeding ground for opposition since the illegitimate establishment of communist rule. In his famous essay, "The Power of the
Powerless", Vaclav Havel underlined the fact that disillusionment was constant in East European societies and that at the lowest "pre-political" levels of society, "opposition", in its broadest sense, occurred on a daily basis. It was manifested in the private lives of individuals long before it emerged on the visible surface of society. Moreover, in addition to the regular "pre-political" expression of dissent at the grassroots level of society, informal networks developed for the specific purpose of circumventing state barriers that prevented citizens from meeting their daily needs. In 1985-86, Steven Sampson wrote that, "In Eastern Europe, highly valued and needed resources are constantly in scarce supply, due either to economic mismanagement or political expediency. This makes informal channels and social networks absolutely vital for the day to day existence of virtually all East Europeans." This combination of widespread personal opposition, manifested in the private lives of individuals, and well-established informal networks provided citizens with a certain readiness for other types of collective behavior. It was the paradox of the system itself that precisely those overly restrictive measures meant to control the behavior of individuals, in fact, encouraged citizens to seek out and practice means of getting around those measures.

Before examining the issue of how specific barriers that had been imposed for the purpose of preventing the establishment of autonomous groups had been circumvented, it must be said that throughout the region, state and party controls over autonomous activities varied in intensity. For example, leaders in Hungary and Poland exercised something of a grudging tolerance toward such activities, while the leaderships of Romania
and Czechoslovakia were far more determined to prevent or eradicate independent grassroots activities through systematic repression. Nevertheless, in each of these countries, the laws against independent action remained on the books, so that in every instance in the late 1970s and through the mid-1980s, these independent groups were engaging in acts of civil disobedience. In each country, this required that an original daring group of individuals test the waters to determine how successful they might be in establishing themselves as a group and then pursuing their stated goals. In the late 1970s in Bulgaria, there were no such attempts at establishing permanent autonomous groups, although individual actors continued to emerge as independent voices in society. Attempts to form independent movements in Romania in the late 1970s failed. In the GDR, those groups that emerged under the protection of the Church were more successful in establishing a permanency than were groups that emerged "unprotected". In Czechoslovakia, Charter 77 and VONS were the only groups that emerged in the late 1970s and, despite severe repression against them by the security apparatus, continued to exist through the 1980s. Finally, in Poland and Hungary, a certain level of grudging tolerance among the political leadership gave way to the establishment of autonomous groups that were not confronted with the same degree of official repression faced by similar groups elsewhere in the region. However, it was particularly in Poland that the phenomenon of autonomous groups began to flourish, culminating first in the establishment of the Solidarity trade union in 1980 and later in the virtual explosion of smaller underground independent movements during the period of martial law and normalization.
What is important here, however, is that the establishment of each of these autonomous groups in each country of the region represented a violation of the then current law. It was thus a rejection of the existing rules and represented a decision among the independent actors to distance themselves from the existing system. At first, none of these groups was registered with the Ministry of Interior as mandated by law; many espoused goals that overlapped with existing state-sponsored mass organizations, thus interfering with the monopoly the state had claimed on activity; while others pursued activities that could clearly be deemed contrary to the official interests of the state (such as the goal of demilitarization held by the semi-autonomous groups in the GDR).

This brings us to the second question regarding the formation of autonomous groups in Marxist-Leninist societies; namely, how did they establish the basis of their operations and find the resources necessary to build their structures? Here, circumvention of the existing barriers required that autonomous groups seek their own material resources necessary to their functioning — resources that would otherwise have been provided by the state — and, in some cases, create their own separate set of institutions and communication networks to facilitate their activities. The acquisition of some material resources was rather straight-forward. For example, groups could hold meetings in private apartments (albeit clandestinely) rather than in public meeting rooms officially designated by the state. Laws prohibiting the collection of dues by organizations not registered with the state could be outright ignored as they, in fact, were through various fund-raising activities initiated by these illegal groups. What was more problematic — and this was true to vastly differing
degrees in the various countries of Eastern Europe -- was the acquisition of resources that would assist in providing a means of communication through samizdat publication for the achievement of autonomous group goals. Poland was a special case in this regard, as autonomous group activists employed techniques of underground publication that had been used during Second World War resistance efforts, clandestinely accessed state printing presses during non-working hours, and were recipients of modern copy, off-set, and printing equipment provided by Western organizations via underground networks. Such resources provided the infra-structure for the largest, most extensive underground publishing endeavor in the region.

By contrast, in a country like Czechoslovakia, autonomous group activists, facing far more restrictive barriers against self-publication, continued to employ the more primitive technique of typing multiple copies on regular typewriters. Entire books were duplicated and circulated in this form. In the GDR, autonomous groups existing around the churches were able to use the resources of the Church for their publicity needs. In Hungary, independent publishing endeavors often secretly used official printing presses.

Strategies were also devised to counteract government barriers against autonomous group activity. For example, in both Poland and Hungary, independent insurance funds were established among underground publishers to protect them against the losses incurred when their equipment was confiscated by security forces. Funds were set up in Poland, from private donations, to reimburse activists for fines levied against them in the course of their independent pursuits or for wages lost during strikes.
Such strategies attempted to guarantee the success of autonomous group activity by alleviating the financial burden imposed by the government as a penalty for "opposition". Obviously, when governments imprisoned or expelled activists, counter-strategies were more difficult to devise. Still, opportunities were created at the grassroots level, in some countries, to enhance autonomous group activity.

There was one other major barrier to independent action, more subjective in nature and far more difficult to measure. Indeed, its collapse could only be seen in the change in behavior among groups in society. This was the barrier of fear used to control, direct, encourage or prevent certain forms of public activity among East European citizens. Exactly when that fear began to erode is impossible to specify. But it became increasingly evident, at different points in time in different countries, that fear was indeed on the wane.19

The most important factor that contributed to the breakdown of barriers to independent action, and directly related to the erosion of fear as a mechanism of control, was the program of reform proposed and set into action by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. This factor was of major relevance on two levels for those seeking change in their respective societies. First, it raised hopes and expectations among citizens that a course of political and economic reform would similarly be adopted in their country, thus placing pressure on those party leaders most resistant to change.20 Second, the Soviet program of reform signalled, to an originally incredulous Eastern Europe, that individual countries were on their own, expected to solve their own problems, and free to do so without the ominous threat of the Brezhnev Doctrine. Since
the Brezhnev Doctrine had long served as the ultimate linchpin guaranteeing conformity among Soviet Bloc nations, its demise as a plausible policy marked the onset of new opportunities for independent action never before possible in post World War II Eastern Europe. It was, indeed, at this point that pressures for change from below increased precipitously.

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that Gorbachev's reform programs and the concomitant loosening of the political stronghold by the Soviet Union over Eastern Europe was the catalyst for very rapid change that had begun years earlier in Poland and Hungary and, to a lesser extent in the GDR and Czechoslovakia. The nature of some of those changes is described in the following section on the functions served by autonomous groups in Eastern Europe.

**THE FUNCTIONS OF AUTONOMOUS GROUPS IN COMMUNIST EAST EUROPE**

Despite the fact that official barriers continued to exist in communist East Europe, designed to circumscribe the activity and power potential of the emergent autonomous groups, these groups nonetheless served a number of important functions in those societies, both on a daily basis, as well as in preparation for events to come. The discussion here is divided into two broad categories of manifest and latent functions and considers their impact in the socio-political sphere both at the micro and macro level of analysis.

The manifest functions, of course, were reflected in the stated goals of these autonomous groups — goals that included attempting to force domestic leaderships to observe the international covenants on human and civil rights they themselves had entered, demanding the observance of
old policies and the creation of new ones reflecting concern for the natural environment, promoting peace and demilitarization, defending the rights of ethnic minority groups, and so forth. There were many cases in which such goals were actually achieved. Poland's autonomous Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), for example, achieved all of its goals within a year, at which point the group adopted broader objectives and changed its name to reflect the expansion of its goals.\textsuperscript{21} The Solidarity trade union achieved its goal of obtaining legal status and formal registration not once, but twice, under communist rule.\textsuperscript{22} The Freedom and Peace Movement (WiP) in Poland won the provision it sought for alternative military service and it did so in 1988, while the country was still being ruled by a communist politico-military establishment. Ecological groups in Hungary managed to persuade the government, in May 1989, to abandon plans for the construction of a dam that was deemed threatening to the natural environment.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to the manifest functions reflected in their stated goals, these autonomous groups, by and large, were also involved in publicizing the problems of society. This was a particularly important function in the communist setting as restrictions on freedom of speech precluded open discussion of such issues, especially those that focused on the shortcomings of the political and socio-economic order. Thus, human rights groups not only pressured governments to observe international law in such matters, but also monitored the activities of those governments, collecting information on specific cases of human rights violations and making that information public both domestically (through an underground press or through organized public demonstrations) and internationally.
(through direct communication with Western human rights organizations).

One of the best examples of publicity-seeking activities organized by autonomous groups in Eastern Europe was the staging, in November 1988, of "Romania Action Day". Since Romanians themselves had been unable to organize protests in their own behalf to denounce Ceausescu's abominable human rights record, they became a major rallying point for demonstrations among numerous opposition groups in the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and especially Hungary, with similar demonstrations occurring simultaneously in several Western European countries. While the protests in Eastern Europe were met with varying degrees of repression by security forces, they did succeed to some extent in calling attention to the plight of Romanian citizens living under the Ceausescu regime.

Where the specific goals of autonomous groups were not directly achieved, their pursuance oftentimes resulted in a "reaction" on the part of the government that in some way reflected those particular goals. For example, the 1988 decision on the part of the government of Czechoslovakia to sponsor an official human rights forum was a reaction -- undertaken in response to pressures from autonomous human rights groups. Likewise, the East German government's declaration that it was itself a "peace movement" was a response to mounting pressures from independent peace movements within the larger society. While such "reactions" by the state can certainly be viewed as self-serving propaganda aimed at coopting the truly independent movements in those countries, they were nevertheless actions that would not otherwise have been taken had it not been for the potential threat being posed by the activities of autonomous groups in those societies.
There were, finally, many examples of governments in communist East Europe offering "concessions without conceding" in response to mounting pressures from autonomous groups. General Jaruzelski had worked out a scheme for a Consultative Council that was to appease the demands of Solidarity activists and other opposition groups for direct citizen input into the decision-making process. This was viewed by the Polish government as a "compromise", but in no way met the requirements put forth by Solidarity that sought, instead, to have its union relegalized, thereby guaranteeing it would have a regular, institutionalized voice in decisions regarding union matters. In Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, the government decided in 1988 to allow Alexander Dubcek to travel to Italy to personally accept his honorary doctorate at the University of Bologna. While this decision was not undertaken in direct response to demands made by a particular group in Czechoslovak society, it nevertheless seems unlikely that the government would have acted in this way had it not been for the increasing popular unrest within the broader society. The point here is that such "concessions without conceding" were in fact changes brought about by the pressures of autonomous groups pursuing their goals prior to the revolutionary changes that occurred in the region in the final months of 1989.

Often unstated by the groups was the fact that the pursuance of their specific goals in a communist state required systemic change incompatible with the tenets of the existing ideology and the structure of power. For example, strict adherence to international covenants on human and civil rights and to domestic constitutions that reflected those rights -- at least in theory -- would inevitably shake the foundations of the
existing totalitarian or authoritarian order. Freedom of expression, assembly, conscience and the right to free elections with secret ballots pave the way to political pluralism. This is all the more true if one accepts the argument that while political pluralism may be suppressed, it does in fact exist in all modern societies. The goals of independent ecological movements were likewise incompatible with the communist structure of power. They challenged, on the one hand, state policy to increase material output at all costs and, on the other, linked pollution to the issue of citizen rights to a clean and healthy environment.

Thus, as a consequence of the manifest functions of these autonomous groups, the foundation of the socio-political and economic system itself was being called into question.

In addition to the manifest functions served, autonomous groups had a profound impact on the socio-political dynamics of East European communist states as a result of their latent functions, both at the macro and micro levels of society. At the macro level, by virtue of their existence and ability to function, these groups signalled to others that such activity was at least possible. In providing such a signal, they encouraged others to become active. The degree of repression against opposition voices in Eastern Europe had long served as a barometer of the general political climate. Thus, the very ability of these groups to organize indicated to others in society that something had changed -- whether that change was in fact real or perceived. As mentioned earlier, fear, the major mechanism of control in communist systems, began to diminish for some individuals, thereby further encouraging activism in others. To the extent that members of such groups represented a
revitalization of social morality, they served "as a 'gauge' of honesty and courage against which people judge(d) their own and others' behavior." They often provided heroes to larger circles of passive supporters who had been greatly demoralized by decades of communist rule. While it is true that most activists in these autonomous groups were completely unknown to individuals outside their tightly knit circles, the autonomous group phenomenon in communist East Europe did produce popular heroes such as Lech Walesa, who was very much a symbol of honesty and courage and an inspiration to millions of people in Poland and abroad.

Autonomous groups pursuing self-proclaimed goals altered the structure of power and eroded the legitimacy and authority of the East European political elite. They introduced non-communist elements into communist systems where the incompatibility of elements could not be tolerated by the existing structures. Moreover, the fact that many of the autonomous groups assumed goals that directly corresponded to those of the state-sponsored mass organizations meant that the very element of competition that the state had managed to avoid for decades through its system of registering voluntary associations had appeared. In Poland and Hungary, even prior to the massive changes that swept the region in 1989, some autonomous groups whose goals overlapped with those of the state-sponsored organizations and agencies had actually been allowed to legally register, while the applications for registration by other groups — deemed more political in nature — were denied. The very fact that autonomous groups adopted goals that had previously fallen within the exclusive jurisdiction of state-controlled organizations made a clear statement about the ineffectiveness of the officially created, government-sanctioned, mass
voluntary associations. After all, each country had an officially sponsored mass organization whose purpose was to preserve nature. Why, then, the need for a grassroots ecological movement? Each had a state-sponsored voluntary or professional agency assigned the task of providing care to the needy. Why, then, the emergence of self-help organizations, particularly in a system that boasted about its commitment to the social and economic rights of its citizens? Each country had official trade unions that claimed to represent the interests of the working class. Why, then, the need for independent unions? Thus, the existence of these groups, at the very least, called into question the efficacy of the state in achieving its declared (though not necessarily pursued) goals. As such, the goals of the autonomous groups called the attention of elites and non-elites to many of the unmet national priorities.

The emergence of multiple illegal autonomous groups, established with their own sense of permanency and long-term objectives, created instability in a political system that prohibited their existence. Whether the state had tried and failed to break the back of the autonomous groups through the use of security forces or whether it had chosen to tolerate and ignore the phenomenon, the power of the state was in fact undermined by the existence of these illegal organizations. In Poland and Hungary, where the autonomous group phenomenon was most developed throughout the 1980s, the laws on voluntary associations in those countries became obsolete and ineffective, since they no longer reflected the reality of the situation at hand. The discrepancy put a strain on the socio-political order, as well as on the judicial system. In fact, one of the first orders of business undertaken by the reform-minded party leaders of Hungary
following the ouster of Janos Kadar was the redrafting of the existing laws on voluntary associations. These were the beginnings of the profound changes that Eastern Europe underwent at the end of the 1980s, and they were changes brought on directly as the result of the activities of previously illegal autonomous groups operating in communist systems.

Finally, as a latent function on the macro level of society, autonomous groups undermined communist policies aimed at atomizing citizens and breaking apart communities. This was especially true since, as stated earlier in this report, these autonomous groups in communist systems differed from the Western notion of voluntary associations, in part, because of the special bonds that were created between group members acting together in defiance of the state and oftentimes at great personal risk. In many respects, the repression these group members faced in the course of their activities was a "rite of passage" that served to underline their mutual commitment to the cause.

There were still other latent functions served by these autonomous groups at the micro level of society. First, members of autonomous groups got practice in the art of self-organization and in the strategy of confronting political elites. The development of both organizational skills and strategy was problematic on two counts. First, decades of political barriers imposed on citizens for the purpose of preventing independent activity left many would-be activists in a position of having to learn the rules of self-initiated organizational behavior. Second, the phenomenon of grassroots organizations systematically pressing for change in communist systems was new in these societies, and thus the strategy for confronting elites was uncharted. Participation in autonomous
groups offered members the opportunity to learn skills and strategies and to develop new ones. As a consequence of this latent function, autonomous groups, whether involved specifically in peace initiatives or ecological matters, were able to provide their acquired organizational expertise, in turn, to the disorganized masses demanding change from below. This was the case during the mobilization of the Solidarity movement in August 1980, when striking workers provided the power for change, while autonomous groups, including KOR, the Free Trade Union Movement, and Young Poland, provided the organizational expertise, as well as the local, national and international communications network. By 1989, as will be described in the final section of this report, autonomous groups throughout the region lent their expertise to the increasingly restive masses. In 1981, Velim Precan, reporting on the progress of Charter 77, wrote that "the quality of ... future changes will be in part determined by the results of the preparatory work in that period of immobility and lifelessness that appeared to be a vacuum but that in reality was filled with strivings to preserve, regenerate and re-cultivate." In this respect, autonomous group activity in communist East Europe can be viewed as "preparatory work" that served the function of accumulating experience and know-how that could later be tapped by others seeking change.

The community of autonomous group activists provided a steady forum for the open discussion of ideas. The individuals who regularly contributed their writings to the Hungarian underground publication Beszelő are a case in point. While they themselves did not constitute a group with the expressed purpose of achieving a specific goal, their activities around the publication of this journal did reflect the common purpose
of free discourse. It was in this publication that many of the possibilities for future change in Hungarian society were first formulated. Likewise, it was in the Polish underground publication Robotnik, in the late 1970s, that the initial set of demands, later put forth by Polish workers in their August 1980 strikes, was first discussed. It is doubtful that the ideas and formulations of single individuals, that is, opposition figures acting in isolation or outside the parameters of an established group, however informal, could have had the same impact on the Polish events of that summer.

Oftentimes, members of autonomous groups were also provided with the opportunity to practice the art of gathering accurate information in societies where strict censorship was enforced. They needed the information in order to formulate their demands and to be perceived as credible actors in the eyes of both or either the broader public and the ruling elite. Basically, they needed the information for the sake of their argument, whether they were trying to persuade domestic leaders or to make international appeals to the West. Since access to information is itself a form of power, communist elites had long withheld accurate or complete data or news coverage from non-elites in society. Thus, the ability of autonomous groups to obtain correct information provided them, if not with power per se, then with a weapon they could use against the rulers.

All of these micro-level latent functions taken together -- practice in the art of self-organization and in the strategy of confronting elites, access to forums for open discussion of ideas and programs, experience in collecting accurate information -- formed the basis for the cultivation
of an alternative political leadership. Membership and activeness in these organizations, especially considering the personal risks involved, served as a testing ground for the degree of commitment to a set of political ideals. It provided activists with political credentials that could later be presented to wider groups within the society at large. Such credentials came in handy long before the dramatic changes of late 1989. It was during Solidarity's heyday in 1980-81 that Adam Michnik arrived at a scene in Otwock where an angry crowd was threatening to lynch a police officer. He intervened in the corporal's behalf, introducing himself to the crowd by saying, "I am Adam Michnik. I am an anti-socialist force," referring to the label given KOR members by the official communist party daily. This evidence of his credentials as an opposition activist was met with applause by the group who had gathered. But by 1989, in each of the six countries included in this report, those credentials proved not only useful, but crucial in the hurried establishment of new leaderships. Again, most activists in these autonomous groups had not been known to the wider public, in which case, the history of their opposition activities quickly established their credibility. Others had some form of a constituency among fellow activists and among larger circles of passive supporters. Since these activists were commonly punished through their places of employment, their political persuasions and involvement in autonomous groups were often known, at least superficially, to coworkers. The role played by this alternative political leadership, cultivated for widely varying lengths of time in the different countries of communist East Europe, is the topic of the final section of this report, following the discussion of power.
THE POWER OF AUTONOMOUS GROUPS IN COMMUNIST EAST EUROPE

In addition to the barriers that were said to preclude the development of autonomous groups in Marxist-Leninist systems, their emergence was thought to be of only limited significance, given their impotence in a context in which they were not afforded adequate channels for the articulation of interests or provided with the necessary institutions for the implementation of meaningful change. Such notions of the inherent inability of autonomous groups to initiate change in communist systems is in obvious need of reevaluation.

In the previous section, the functions served by autonomous groups in communist systems were considered. The power to initiate change was demonstrated through those functions, even in the absence of channels for the articulation of interest or institutionalized mechanisms for change. In some cases, autonomous groups were able to achieve their specifically defined goals; in other cases, they were able to cause a reaction on the part of leaders who made public overtures in the direction of those goals; and finally, groups were able to win concessions in the form of compromises on the part of the ruling elite. All of these instances indicate that the autonomous groups wielded at least some power in getting the ruling elite to take certain actions that they otherwise would likely have not taken.

This section addresses four distinct issues related to the power of autonomous groups in communist Eastern Europe including its sources, avenues of expression, and dimensions. The list is not exhaustive, but rather focuses on the unique aspects of organized grassroots power in communist systems. The aspects include: (a) credibility as a source of
power; (b) the relationship between power and accountability; (c) the unconventional avenues through which autonomous groups articulated their interests in Eastern Europe; and finally (d) the changing equation in the balance of power between autonomous groups and the ruling elite.

With the single exception of the nation-wide mass Solidarity movement that swept Poland in 1980-81, autonomous groups throughout the region (as well as in Poland itself before and after Solidarity's heyday) were characteristically small in size, most often comprising only handfuls of individuals who, in turn, enjoyed the active support of a larger circle of non-elites and the passive support of still larger groups within society. No matter how broadly we draw the concentric circles of active and passive support, the autonomous groups in the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s remained an anomaly in these societies, engaging only tiny minorities of the population in their pursuits. Except for those activist leaders who received negative publicity in the official press (a matter that will be dealt with in more detail below), most autonomous group members were not known to the vast majority of citizens in a given country. The fact of the smallness of these movements is being underlined here precisely because of the power they were able to accumulate both domestically and internationally, despite their size, by virtue of their credibility. When the general societal consensus is that the ruling establishment is lying, individuals willing to speak the truth — or what is perceived as the truth — can quickly gain authority which, at some level, can later translate into power. The power of truth and hard evidence is difficult to combat and especially so when those put on the defensive (in this case, the ruling elite) lack credibility to begin with.
The autonomous group phenomenon in Eastern Europe happened to be characterized by the pursuit of truth. It was the principal weapon of attack against the ruling elite. Groups went about conscientiously collecting evidence for the purpose of achieving their specific goals, whether those data focused on environmental pollution or documentation of the violation of human rights in a given country. The accuracy of the information gathered by these groups provided the basis upon which their credibility was established, not only in the eyes of other non-elites within the larger society, but also in the eyes of some members of the ruling elite, interested parties and corresponding organizations in the West, and the Western press. In many cases, these groups became information centers that could be counted on by Western journalists for their accuracy and for the fact that they had information that was officially unavailable. As such, credibility became an important basis of power.

Having established some measure of credibility, these groups were able, in turn, to insist on the same from their rulers. They did so through the very effective strategy of demanding accountability and adherence to the rule of law. Originally claiming non-interference with the political system or the ultimate authority of the communist party, citizens organized efforts merely to ensure that the ruling elite abide by its own laws, apply those laws equally and faithfully in the administration of justice, and that the laws of the state be consistent with the international agreements those leaders had entered. Authorities were held accountable by the grassroots organizations, in an increasingly assertive and systematic way, for the failure of the system (economic
mismanagement, the deterioration of the natural environment, etc.). In
addition, Western governments and institutions began in the 1980s to demand
accountability from East European leaders not only in politics, but
primarily in the realm of economics, with financial institutions seeking
some guarantees against the risks of future investments.

Not all East European leaders, of course, had responded to pressures
for accountability. Nicolae Ceausescu, in particular, proved impervious
to international outcry against his shameful human rights record.
Nonetheless, demands for accountability on the part of the East European
ruling elite became increasingly persistent from the late 1970s through
the late 1980s, further eroding the authority, legitimacy and power of
those rulers.

Next, we come to the question of how autonomous groups in Eastern
Europe could bring about change in their societies if they lacked the
institutionalized means to do so. This lack of channels for the
articulation of interests and the institutional mechanisms to bring about
change had oftentimes been used, in the past, to explain why grassroots
efforts in communist systems would be unable to achieve their goals.
If fact, the concept itself was misapplied. It imposed a democratic model
on a system that was its opposite. Autonomous groups in Eastern Europe
instead used unconventional mechanisms through which to articulate their
interests, present their demands, and pressure the ruling elite to
institute change.

The use of an underground press has already been mentioned. This
method was particularly widespread in Poland, although also in use in
Hungary and Czechoslovakia where both circulation, titles and readerships
were more limited. This could be seen as a positive means of gaining a constituency or support for certain goals. Autonomous groups, however, were also able to benefit from negative publicity provided by the official press which, through its lack of credibility among the general public, inadvertently promoted autonomous groups and their leaders in its scathing indictments of independent activists in the mass media. Whether or not the general public rallied to the cause of these individuals, the official press did contribute to publicizing their works and deeds — however inaccurately — making them known entities to larger groups within society. In a similar vein, public trials were used by autonomous group activists. Karel Srp, head of the "Jazz Section" of the Musicians' Union in Czechoslovakia, was thus able to gain public recognition through his criminal trial. Likewise, Adam Michnik refused to be "pardoned" during an amnesty of prisoners following the martial law period in Poland, preferring instead to stand trial as a means of gaining a forum in which to present his views and make them a part of an official record. All of these examples — of the underground press, the negative coverage in the official media, and public criminal trials — were avenues for the articulation of interest and a means of gaining publicity for the goals of and actors involved in autonomous group activity.

In still other cases, autonomous groups in Eastern Europe appealed to Western governments, institutions and organizations to articulate their interests and goals in their behalf, thereby circumventing the domestic barriers to grassroots influence on state policy. The international human rights movement is a case in point. Until the early 1970s, human rights groups in the West had a predominantly leftist character, preferring to
target right-wing dictatorships as the principal abusers of such citizen rights. Following the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975, human rights became an issue of increasing international economic and political concern. President Jimmy Carter placed it firmly on the American foreign policy agenda, taking serious heed for the first time, in an institutional way, to protests against human rights violations made by Soviet and East European citizens themselves. This matter angered communist leaders who accused the United States of policing the world and interfering in the domestic policies of sovereign nations.

Human rights matters became a bargaining chip for the United States in its dealings with East European governments seeking loans, credits or MFN status. Moreover, unofficial human rights groups throughout Eastern Europe monitored and reported government abuses toward citizens to the appropriate international agencies and organizations. Access to this information varied with each country, and the degree of difficulty in obtaining updated reports, for example, on the situation of political prisoners, was a direct function of the magnitude of human rights violations occurring in that country. Still, the channels had been established, and information presented by autonomous groups in Eastern Europe to Western human rights institutions was used in the negotiation of loans and credits. This was an institutionalized channel for the articulation of interests by non-elites to elites in Eastern Europe, via the West.

Other Western organizations that were counterparts to East European autonomous group efforts served the same purpose. Free labor organizations in the West gathered information from East European groups on the violation
of worker rights and free trade union concerns. They assisted the free trade union cause in Eastern Europe both politically and financially. Likewise, environmental groups, civil liberties groups, peace associations, autonomous PEN clubs, and groups seeking religious freedom communicated with their Western counterparts or with other organizations willing to support and promote their efforts.

In addition, East European autonomous group leaders were communicating their particular concerns directly to Western political leaders. Increasingly, these autonomous group representatives went directly to the centers of power during their visits to the West. They became increasingly adept at such Western arts as lobbying, using the broadcast media to promote their cause, and fund-raising. Solidarity spokesman Janusz Onyszkiewicz, for example, met with members of the British Parliament and appeared on a telecast interview with the BBC in 1988 before coming to the United States to testify before Congress on the socio-political and economic situation in Poland (an act for which he was severely condemned by Polish authorities and the official Polish media).

Hungarian opposition leaders cultivated extensive contacts in the West, likewise promoting the cause of institutional change in Hungary. In fact, making initial contact with high level Western political or public figures seemed to become a regular strategy for East European autonomous groups. Even newly formed autonomous groups in Bulgaria -- where virtually no tradition of activeness had been established -- placed a priority on initiating such contacts. In 1988, only months after its establishment, the Bulgarian "Independent Discussion Club for the Support of Glasnost and Perestroika" managed to meet with Francois Mitterand during an
unofficial visit to the West.

Fund-raising by East European opposition activists, especially though not exclusively from Poland, became a major reason for travel to the West. Some of the money was raised clandestinely from private sources; other sums, such as that given by the U.S. Congress to Solidarity, were raised publicly. In fact, Solidarity had been so successful at getting the funds it needed for its operational costs and its charitable aid programs that the Polish government proposed making the relegalization of the independent trade union conditional upon its agreement to refuse additional money from Western sources. Some concern had been expressed by the Polish authorities that Solidarity was getting money from the same Western institutions the government had planned to approach for assistance, thus disrupting potential avenues of help for the state.38

The Western media has already been mentioned in the context of its reliance on the credible and otherwise inaccessible information collected by autonomous groups in Eastern Europe. But these groups, in turn, relied on the Western media to promote their causes both internationally and domestically. The most important role, in publicizing the issues, activities and goals of autonomous groups to the citizens of Eastern Europe, was played by the foreign radio broadcasts, particularly Radio Free Europe and the BBC. Action programs were presented, arguments were made, and evidence of wrong-doing by East European governments was publicized through broadcasts into Eastern Europe.

Internationally, Western reporters and news agencies publicized the goals, programs and activities of East European autonomous groups to a world audience. This was, of course, particularly true in countries in
which Western journalists had relatively easy access to such information, thus excluding the tiny, but relevant opposition activities taking place in a country like Romania. This meant that, in Romania, citizens were unaware of the names of the actors involved in opposition activities in their own country -- a point that became particularly important during the December revolution and its immediate aftermath and one that will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

All of these examples of the reliance on Western governments, organizations and the media to support and promote the goals of autonomous group activity in Eastern Europe demonstrate the manner in which the barriers to the articulation of interest in Eastern Europe were circumvented. In the 1980s, the West played an increasingly important role in representing the interests of East European grassroots concerns.

Finally, we turn to the issue of the changing balance of power. Faced with the resilience of autonomous groups in their respective societies, East European ruling elites were faced with two undesirable options: (1) to rid the society of independent organizations through systematic repression which, by then, had to be proportional in its strength to the resilience of the groups themselves; or (2) dilute their own power by accommodating autonomous groups institutionally in an effort to reestablish stability. Nicolae Ceausescu continued to employ the first option very effectively, ridding the society of independent voices (largely through internal exile or expulsion from the country) long before they had the chance to establish an organizational base. However, the long-term success of his strategy seemed dubious, at best, given the rising tension in the society as a whole. Todor Zhivkov, Erich Honecker and,
to a lesser extent, Milos Jakes, likewise continued to exercise the first option, although the persistence of existing and newly created autonomous groups was forcing them into a position of having to continually reevaluate just how much force it would take to put an end to independent activities. Fierce repression against the Bulgarian "Independent Discussion Club in Support of Glasnost and Perestroika" in 1988, for example, ironically resulted in an increase in membership rolls. In the GDR, Honecker had been inconsistent in his suppression of the activities of the semi-autonomous peace groups, while indecision on the part of the leaders of Czechoslovakia in 1988 was evidenced in the irregularity with which civil disobedience was being quelled and punished. By the latter years of the 1980s, only the leaders of Poland and Hungary were employing the second option by legally accommodating many autonomous groups already in existence in their respective societies and rewriting existing legislation on voluntary associations in an attempt to reestablish a measure of domestic political stability.

Still, the question of the reversibility of changes initiated by autonomous groups in Eastern Europe was constantly being raised in light of the fact that real power in these societies was said to remain in the hands of those who controlled the military and the security apparatus. Thus, even changes brought about by a very powerful national movement, such as that of the 1980-81 Solidarity trade union, could be reversed through the imposition of military rule. But in drawing such a mistaken conclusion, three important factors were overlooked. First, there was never any evidence that the violent or forceful suppression of movements for change in Eastern Europe accomplished anything more than to postpone
the ultimate resolution of conflict inherent in those societies. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Polish national movement for reform of that same year, as well as the 1968 Prague Spring, all carried their legacies with them, in their respective countries, into the 1980s.

Moreover, martial law in Poland did not succeed in breaking the spirit of the Solidarity movement. Second, the amount of power held by authorities through their control of the armed forces and the security apparatus was in direct proportion to their willingness to use that power. In 1981, General Jaruzelski had argued that the decision to declare martial law was made in an effort to prevent a Soviet military solution to the Polish political and economic crisis. Even in the declaration of the state of war, Jaruzelski proved unwilling to order Polish soldiers to shoot Polish civilians in the round-up of Solidarity activists. While the threat of the use of military violence may be seen as a powerful control over society, the fact that Jaruzelski was unwilling to employ that option already spoke of a change in the power equation in that country. Third, nothing altered the equation of power between rulers and ruled in East European societies more than Gorbachev's decision not to invoke the Brezhnev Doctrine. East European leaders were left on their own, without the backing of Soviet military might, to face increasingly restive and assertive populations demanding freedom and democracy in the latter years of the 1980s. While control over the military and security apparatus remained firmly in the hands of the communist ruling elite in each of the East European countries, domestic rulers -- with the sorry exception of Ceausescu -- proved unwilling or unable to use that power without the guaranteed backing of Soviet military force.39
Throughout the 1980s, autonomous groups in Eastern Europe were laying the groundwork for events to come in the final year of the decade. They managed to build up their credibility among larger circles within their own society (albeit oftentimes only in a limited way) and to build centers of support for their causes internationally. They persistently demanded that the ruling elite in their countries be held accountable for their decisions and actions. They used unconventional avenues to publicize their causes and goals and to gain support both at home and abroad. Finally, when the time came for domestic rulers to decide whether to begin to accommodate some of the grassroots changes that were already occurring in society or to eradicate them through the use of force, the question of the ultimate effectiveness of employing military or security forces against the population seemed, at best, unclear in all but Romania and possibly the GDR. It was this change in the balance of power in these societies that eventually gave way to the rapid downfall of communist leaders throughout the region in the last months of 1989.

THE ROLE OF AUTONOMOUS GROUPS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES OF 1989

By the late 1980s, the spontaneous emergence of a variety of autonomous groups had become a regional phenomenon in communist East Europe. Throughout this analysis, reference has been made to the different stages of development of autonomous group activity in the specific countries of the region. Before examining the role played by these groups in the revolutionary changes that swept the region in 1989, a brief summary of those developments in each of the countries is in order.

Poland had the longest, most continuous and extensive network of
autonomous groups of any nation in the region. Beginning in the late 1970s with small pockets of opposition, autonomous groups by 1980 served to facilitate the mobilization of the nationally-based Solidarity trade union movement. With the imposition of martial law in late 1981, the movement moved underground and, due to severe constraints on its activities and the arrest of most of its leaders, became factionalized while still operating largely under the unifying banner of Solidarnosc. The 1980s had been characterized by a stand-off between a military-political establishment and an angry population that basically held to a position of non-cooperation with the ruling elite. Finally forced to negotiate with Solidarity in order to begin a sorely needed program of economic reform, the Polish government agreed to the relegalization of the trade union in return for Solidarity's participation in partially free elections that were aimed ultimately at the union's sharing of responsibility with the ruling elite for the program of economic reform and playing the role of the bearer of bad tidings in terms of the financial sacrifices the population would have to endure.

What made Poland's autonomous group phenomenon unique was that it operated under the protective umbrella of Solidarity. Countless non-Solidarity groups were thus able to come into existence. Some were offshoots of the trade union movement, created by supporters and activists who wished to pursue other specific goals and basically did so in conjunction with Solidarity, while others were formed not only independent of the union, but pursuing goals in conflict with or contrary to those of Solidarity itself. Still, the fact that so powerful a movement as Solidarity had blossomed in 1980-81 and continued to operate underground,
provided something of a protective shield behind which other groups could function. Nowhere else in Eastern Europe was this the case. The situation indeed did give way to a virtual explosion of autonomous group activity, both underground and later increasingly above-ground, with an expansive and ever more institutionalized underground press.

Hungary likewise had a rich, though far less extensive, history of autonomous group activity which, from the late 1970s through the early 1980s, was centered mainly in Budapest and largely involved Hungarian intellectuals engaging in political and economic discussions through the underground press, with no real ties to the working class. By the mid-to late 1980s, and particularly following the ouster of Janos Kadar in May 1988, various new groups emerged with specific action-oriented goals including environmental protection and the defense of the rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania against the repressive policies of Ceausescu.

But Hungary's autonomous group movement was never so entrenched in the society as that of Poland's. Part of the reason for this was that, compared to Poles, Hungarians were not suffering from the same persistent economic crisis and, politically, they were better off than most East Europeans, particularly with respect to such matters as human rights. This is, of course, not to say that Hungarians did not suffer the same types of repression and withholding of individual freedoms characteristic of communist systems. But indeed because of Hungary's relatively better economic and political position in the region, autonomous group activists had difficulty appealing to larger groups within society to join the cause of seeking still greater freedoms and, at the same time, were much less successful than Poles in gaining the interest of a Western audience.
regarding their particular concerns. In short, Hungarians had learned to co-exist with their communist leaders and the division between rulers and ruled was neither so severe nor so confrontational as that in Poland.

By the latter years of the 1980s, political leaders in Hungary were increasingly tolerant of, and in Poland increasingly resigned to, autonomous group activity, as evidenced in the relatively lenient punishments used to discourage activism. Generally speaking, such involvement in autonomous groups was no longer being treated as a criminal offense. In Hungary, many years had passed since "dissidents" had been sentenced to lengthy prison terms, while in Poland, independent activism had been reduced by 1987 to a misdemeanor, although heavy fines were being levied against "offenders".41

In Czechoslovakia, for the decade between 1977 and 1987, only two major autonomous groups existed in the country: namely, Charter 77 and VONS. Over time, Charter 77 had become a virtual clearing-house for a vast array of problems in Czechoslovak society, including issues of human rights, environmental pollution, religious freedom, as well as economic concerns,42 while VONS dealt more specifically with the concerns of individual citizens whose rights had been violated. By the late 1980s, Charter 77 had been endorsed by some twelve hundred mostly Czech citizens, only a minority of whom were actively involved in the day-to-day activities of the organization. In this respect, the decision to sign the Charter was more a matter of being counted as one of its supporters than of pledging oneself to a life of active involvement. Still, this was a visible and concrete demonstration of support and a means of distinguishing oneself in Czechoslovak society as a person committed to change and
standing in opposition to the status quo. As such, the signatory "qualified" for direct and persistent harassment by the security apparatus.

At the same time, in Slovakia, the major form of activism outside the sponsorship of the state was to be found in the growing religious movement that had collected as many as three-quarters of a million signatures on a petition demanding religious freedom, and had involved tens of thousands of believers in spiritual pilgrimages with an underlying political agenda. In Slovakia, this movement was linked with Slovak nationalism.

It was not until 1988 that the number of autonomous groups in Czechoslovakia began to multiply and focus in on narrower and more clearly defined concerns. Most of the new groups emerged through the direct sponsorship of Charter 77 activists who began employing a conscious policy of setting into action a more diverse autonomous group movement.43 The size of popular protests was growing to proportions reminiscent of the Prague Spring some twenty years earlier. Czechoslovak citizens began to awaken to a renewed life of activism and reform through engaging in grassroots efforts. At the same time, the policy of the Czechoslovak leadership toward mounting pressure from below in 1988 and 1989 was somewhat unclear, as certain popular demonstrations for change were largely ignored by security forces, while others were handled with uncommon brutality. It was, in fact, the brutality used against a relatively small demonstration of students in Prague in the autumn of 1989 that led to ever larger demonstrations within a matter of days and eventually resulted in the downfall of the communist leadership.

In the GDR, there were basically two strands of autonomous group
development: the first, a number of independent urban intellectual groups concerned with issues of peace and demilitarization, human rights and civil liberties, the ecology, and women's issues; and, the second, the semi-autonomous groups that acted under the sponsorship of the East German Protestant Churches and focused their activities primarily on the combined issues of peace, demilitarization, and human rights. The independent groups of urban intellectuals occupied a far more tenuous position in society and were systematically repressed by security forces, with their leaders often facing expulsion from the GDR to West Germany. As such, they were never able to gain a strong position in East German society, nor to gain a substantial constituency to support their pursuits.

The situation was quite different with the more than two hundred small peace groups working through the Protestant Churches. By and large, their activities were ignored by the East German authorities except when they ventured to stage a public protest, in which case they oftentimes suffered the same fate as the leaders of the independent urban intellectual groups. But their quiet meetings and discussions continued in East German society for a period spanning from 1979 through 1989. They were not viewed as a disruptive force and rarely posed a direct threat to the East German leadership. Thus, they enjoyed a lengthy period of gestation prior to the events in October 1989 that toppled the Honecker regime.

Bulgarians were latecomers to the autonomous group phenomenon in Eastern Europe. In fact, the Independent Association for the Defense of Human Rights, established in January 1988, was the first autonomous group to emerge in Bulgaria since the 1940s. In March of that year, another group calling itself the Independent Committee for the Defense
of Ruse, was founded for the purpose of protecting the city of Ruse from chlorination pollution being emitted from a Soviet-built plant on the Romanian banks of the Danube. Finally, the Independent Discussion Club in Support of Glasnost and Perestroika was established and the fact that many of its members were also prominent members of the communist party foretold troubles for the ruling elite of Bulgaria and the thirty-five year leadership of Todor Zhivkov. Members of these groups, while systematically harassed and repressed, demonstrated a resilience that was indeed uncommon, especially when one considers that they were all newcomers to the "opposition" scene.

Romania was the single exception in the autonomous group phenomenon that swept Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. The barriers to independent activity set in place by Ceausescu simply could not be broken or circumvented. In the 1980s, only in Romania were there laws requiring that all typewriters be registered with the state as a means of exercising control over and censorship of even the most personal correspondence between citizens. The security apparatus was the most extensive in the region, with estimates of the number of paid informants in society running as high as one in five citizens, thus forcing Romanians to use extreme caution in even their private conversations. There was therefore no basis upon which to consider non-violent autonomous group activity since a clear prescription for failure was widely understood through the policies of the Ceausescu regime.

While it is true that by the late 1980s, communiques were reaching the West from a Romanian group calling itself Romania Democratic Action, those communiques were signed pseudonymously -- in stark contrast to
the ever more public nature of autonomous group activity elsewhere in Eastern Europe -- and thus the actors in that group were known neither to the West nor to wider circles within Romanian society. They were thus unable to distinguish themselves domestically as the individuals who stood up in opposition to the policies of Ceausescu. There was one other autonomous group in Romania that was known to the West: namely, the Hungarian Press of Transylvania, which was founded by Romania's Hungarian minority and set out to protect its diminishing minority rights. In addition, there were a few known "dissidents" in the country who acted as individuals, without the support of a more broadly-based organization or group. In many cases, the names of these dissidents were better known to Western observers than they were to the general Romanian public that was kept in the dark about domestic opposition activities.

While there are many variables that determined and will continue to determine the course of events in each individual East European country as it struggles to make its transition from the decades-long communist monopoly of power to a system with more democratic and pluralist options, the emphasis in this analysis continues to be on the specific role played by autonomous groups during this still very uneasy period of rapid change. In this respect, the role played by autonomous groups is as different as the stages of their evolution in the various countries of Eastern Europe.

It would take an entire volume of "Who's Who" to identify all the East Europeans, once active in illegal autonomous groups, who now hold positions of power in newly elected governments. The description offered here is, instead, an overview, providing examples of the types of roles
played by these groups or by their individual members. Moreover, special attention is given to those groups whose members had an extended history of activism, rather than those that banded together political newcomers at the very time of the revolutionary changes of the period. It was often the case, however, that new political groupings arose spontaneously during the latter months of 1989, composed of veteran activists from other, older autonomous groups in society.

Nowhere was the new role to be played by the once illegal autonomous groups of communist East Europe, in the transition to more democratic political systems, more graphically displayed than in Poland in the first half of 1989. Although there were many strains of opposition in Polish society, Solidarity had remained the unifying movement that became symbolic of the only major viable alternative to communist rule. Having been cajoled by the ruling elite to campaign in the region's first partially free elections, for one-third of the seats in the parliament and for one hundred seats in a newly created Senate, Solidarity candidates swept the elections, winning all but one of the positions for which the independent trade union had run candidates. Individuals, whose activities just weeks prior to the June 1989 election were still technically illegal, who had served lengthy prison sentences during martial law and the early years of normalization, who in every respect had been the nemesis of the current political leadership, walked into the offices of government as parliamentary deputies, senators, ministers, and as prime minister.

Having been given only six weeks to field hundreds of candidates in the nation's first experience with free elections in more than forty years, the fact of the sweeping victory made clear how profound a role
was played by these autonomous group activists over the years. The groundwork for such a victory had been laid well in advance. Unlike the development of autonomous group structures elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the single Solidarity logo linked intellectuals, workers and farmers alike. The extensive networks and widespread involvement of groups within society meant that Solidarity was able to easily identify scores of trusted individuals to run in opposition to the established ruling elite. Moreover, the movement was well-connected to networks of advisors both at home and abroad for consultation on campaign techniques as well as to sources of immediate funding to launch the political campaign. While an argument could certainly be made that Polish voters were casting ballots against the communist party rather than for Solidarity, what they in fact won through these elections was an entire set of incumbents, most of whom were self-described as "non-politicians", who were enormously skilled and practiced in the art of political strategy and in confronting difficult issues, head-on, against nearly impossible odds. Most of these "newcomers" to the institutionalized ranks of government and diplomacy were well-connected either domestically, internationally, or both. Many had access to centers of power in the West with friends in high places in the political and journalistic communities. This situation eased the initial transition away from a communist monopoly of power toward laying the foundations for pluralism and democracy in Poland.

The situation in Hungary was very different for two major reasons. First, the autonomous group phenomenon developed in Hungary in a far more disparate way than in Poland. There was no unifying logo under which Hungarian citizens would join forces and never the protective umbrella,
such as the one served by Solidarity in Poland, that would encourage the
general expansion of autonomous group activity. Second, following the
fall of Janos Kadar as head of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party
in May 1988, reform-minded party leaders provided much of the impetus
for change in that society, thereby diluting some of the potential power
of the existing autonomous groups.

In November 1988, a number of seasoned opposition figures, active
since the late 1970s in Hungary's autonomous group movement, founded the
Alliance of Free Democrats -- a political party that eventually came to
play a significant role in the referendum and parliamentary elections
of late 1989 and early 1990. This was a party of the urban intelligentsia,
running on a platform linking a liberal socio-political outlook with a
conservative economic program that called for radical change to a market
economy in Hungary. 50

This party represented the largest single consolidation of Hungary's
seasoned opposition forces. 51 In November 1989, it was successful in
leading a campaign to postpone the election of the president (originally
scheduled for January 1990) until after the March National Assembly
elections, arguing that current incumbent political leaders would otherwise
have an unfair advantage. 52 But the Alliance of Free Democrats was less
successful in the March National Assembly elections, winning only 92 seats
as compared to the 164 seats won by the more traditionalist Hungarian
Democratic Forum. In fact, the Alliance of Free Democrats, like its
predecessor autonomous group movement of urban intellectuals, was not
representative of the majority of Hungarians and never established
political links with Hungarian workers or farmers. Still, the fact that
actors from earlier groups in Hungary were able to form a strong, viable, alternative political party in Hungary's new political system served as a substantial contribution to a smooth transition to political pluralism in that country.

The remainder of the countries included in this analysis — the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Bulgarian and Romania — underwent a far more sudden and dramatic change when, in the final months of 1989, they had their communist party leaderships toppled by popular pressure (or the threat of that pressure, as was the case in Bulgaria) from the society at large. In the first three countries, public outcries demanded that the ruling elite agree to negotiate with representatives of the opposition in their respective societies. Hence, in each of these cases, there was a clear sense among some segments of the general public that political alternatives did in fact exist within their societies. Only in Romania was the violent revolution singularly targeted at toppling the leadership, with no immediate public sense that a viable alternative leadership was already available in that society, around whom the majority of citizens could rally.

Moreover, these four countries had far more rigid political leaderships than Poland or Hungary, and autonomous group activities had been met with a much higher degree of repression. Until the political avalanche began in the early autumn of 1989, real change seemed unlikely. Autonomous groups were thus left unprepared for the opportunities that suddenly became available to them. In each case, new structures of opposition representatives emerged, gathering together many of the old actors under new organization names in an attempt to form ad hoc umbrella
groups linking a variety of opposition causes.

In the GDR, autonomous groups played a very uneven role in the sudden changes that occurred in 1989. Consider first that the events that led to the downfall of Erich Honecker began with the massive exodus of East German citizens to West Germany. Interestingly, and very relevantly, despite the lengthy history of autonomous group activity in the GDR, the principal form of opposition in that society for years had been that of emigration to the West. Thus, this could be considered the form of opposition activity that was, at once, most common and, at the same time, most effective in shaking the foundations of established power in that country. Moreover, this fact, taken together with Honecker's policy of forced expulsion from the country of independent activists, undoubtedly depleted the ranks of those East Germans who otherwise might have formed the basis of a powerful and extensive network of autonomous group activity. Instead, the independent groups (as opposed to the semi-autonomous groups that existed around the Church) in East Germany were never able to effectively establish themselves as viable political alternatives in that society. While they were gaining in strength and assertiveness in the latter years of the 1980s, the sudden collapse of the Berlin Wall and the immediate attention that was then given to the issues of reunification profoundly altered the power equation within the GDR and may well have taken the wind out of the sails of its autonomous groups.

On the other hand, the Evangelical Church in East Germany, so long a protector of small autonomous peace movements and the single alternative "voice" tolerated by the communist government, did come to
play a major organizational role in the massive changes that occurred in that society in late 1989 and early 1990. For example, during the initial period of mobilization and mass public demonstrations that immediately preceded Honecker's downfall, specific Protestant churches in Leipzig, known to the public for their sponsorship of the peace and human rights movement, were called upon to assist in the organization of the protests themselves. Throughout the country, churches provided meeting places for the mobilization of the opposition.56

In addition, the free parliamentary elections of March 1990 resulted in the election of fourteen pastors (to a four hundred-member body),57 while four other pastors, or former pastors, were appointed to Prime Minister Lothar de Maiziere's government. They included, among others, Rainer Eppelman as Minister of Defense and Disarmament who, paradoxically, had been a major actor in East Germany's unofficial peace movement and later founder and chairman of a new political party called Democratic Awakening; and Walter Romberg as Minister of Finance, who had been a lay official of the Evangelical Church and an activist in the autonomous peace movement.58

Still, it was the Christian Democratic Union, once a rubber-stamp organization within the communist-led East German Parliament, that won most of the seats in the March 1990 free elections. Other newly established political groupings, such as New Forum, failed to take a leading role in East German developments, largely because of their own "internal divisions, the absence of effective organizational structures, and the lack of competent leadership...."59

In Czechoslovakia, the trigger event that led to the mass mobilization
of hundreds of thousands of protesters began with the brutal beating by security officers of a much smaller demonstration of students, calling for freedom and democracy, on Wenceslaus Square in Prague. As the crowds multiplied, reaching the half-million mark in a matter of days, Charter 77 activists, as well as members of other autonomous groups, came together to form an ad hoc team of opposition representatives and the organizational and mobilizing force behind the crowds calling for the ouster of the communist leadership. The ease with which this new group, calling itself Civic Forum, came together during the very sudden and unexpected changes in that society and the manner in which it quickly proceeded to publicize its existence, hold press conferences, and set forth a solid list of demands, was testimony to the vast amount of groundwork that had been laid years in advance by autonomous groups, without any knowledge of if, when or how their organizational expertise might be employed during spontaneous demonstrations calling for the end of communism. A similar group, calling itself the Public Against Violence, simultaneously emerged in Slovakia, also including within its ranks veteran activists from the environmental movement.

The events that followed the sudden break in the monopoly of power by the communist party were no less dramatic — in fact, they occurred more suddenly, though less extensively -- than those in Poland. Veterans of the autonomous group movement left menial jobs (to which they had been "sentenced" precisely because of their activism) and prison cells to assume leading positions in the new government. Charter 77 had been the breeding ground for an alternative political leadership to whom citizens turned when the old guard was removed from power.
While Civic Forum and the Public Against Violence were not the only political alternatives that emerged at the initiative of actors from Czechoslovakia's autonomous group movement, they were the two umbrella political parties that won most of the seats in the country's first free parliamentary elections in June 1990, with Charter 77 activist Vaclav Havel receiving a clear mandate to continue on as the new legitimate president of Czechoslovakia.

In November 1989, Todor Zhivkov's forced resignation precluded the mass mobilization of demonstrations in Bulgaria, although some public protests had already begun a month earlier. Still, representatives of the newly formed autonomous groups were quick to put forth a set of demands calling for an end to the communist monopoly of power and for the timely initiation of negotiations between the government and opposition forces in society. By December, more than a dozen groups united under the common banner of the Union of Democratic Forces, constituting the major organization of political opposition in the country. Other former opposition groups provided the bases for additional independent political parties.

In June 1990, the old communist party, renamed the Socialist Party of Bulgaria, won a plurality of seats in the parliamentary elections. While this victory -- the first for a communist party fielding candidates in free elections in Eastern Europe -- will likely be explained in terms of the relative legitimacy of that party in Bulgaria and the degree to which it is entrenched in that society, another way to consider the outcome of the elections is to concede that the opposition forces were at a severe structural disadvantage. The communist party, while making changes in
the Constitution that would allow for a multiparty system and enacting various laws aimed at substantially reforming the society, never relinquished the reins of power, and thus enjoyed a clear advantage in the elections. Major sources of information -- on the economy, the environment, corruption within the ruling elite, etc. -- remained in the hands of the traditional rulers, and thus prevented opposition groups from launching a campaign forceful enough to topple the establishment. Still, the combined efforts of Bulgarian autonomous groups, operating under the common banner of the Union of Democratic Forces, won clear victories in major Bulgarian cities and provided the country with its first viable political alternative in decades.

Finally, in Romania, where there was neither an established nor an emergent movement of autonomous groups, there was also no alternative leadership to whom Romanian citizens could turn following the downfall of Ceausescu. The National Salvation Front (NSF) was spontaneously formed immediately following Ceausescu's flight from Bucharest, assembling together a largely mismatched collection of individuals — including former communist leaders who had fallen into disfavor with Ceausescu, academics, students and individual dissidents representing no larger autonomous groups or well-defined constituencies within the society — who had the foresight to declare themselves the temporary leaders of the country, unilaterally deciding to take over the reins of government. The head of the NSF, Ion Iliescu, was himself an ex-communist who had remained in Ceausescu's inner circle until being ousted in the early 1980s. Through his May 1990 election to the presidency, Iliescu remained a very controversial figure, not only because of his past affiliations, but also because of his
authoritarian tendencies in dealing with those who opposed him. One of his chief opponents in the election was a Romanian dissident who had returned from exile in Western Europe, thus underlining the fact that the country was hard-pressed to provide its own domestic alternative leaders. Iliescu's campaign focused on his credentials as an experienced politician, and it is indeed true that in a country like Romania, the only forum in which one could have been a political actor was not through autonomous group activity, but through the communist party itself. Iliescu and the NSF won a sweeping victory.

In Romania, it was not only a matter of newly emergent opposition groups or parties that arose following the downfall of Ceausescu having lacked the resources necessary to topple the remains of the communist (or ex-communist) order. Romania lacked the autonomous group tradition and thus the period of gestation that might have allowed groups the time either to establish broader constituencies or to devise political platforms that better reflected the aspirations of fellow Romanians. Had political circumstances permitted, a viable alternative leadership would undoubtedly have emerged as a principal player in the new political order.

SUMMARY REMARKS

In any successful revolution, those who publicly once stood in opposition to the established order become the most likely candidates for an alternative political leadership. The focus here, however, has been on the role of groups as agents of change in Eastern Europe, first under communism and then under new, more democratic socio-political orders. These groups were, in fact, revolutionary groups, similar in their ultimate
impact to those that had mobilized during the American, French, and Russian revolutions. They have yet to be considered in this vein, since they stood in sharp contrast to groups conventionally defined as "revolutionary". East European autonomous movements, after all, were committed to non-violence and initially pursued goals that were not aimed directly at toppling the existing ruling elite. Still, they achieved the same goals as other historical "opposition" groups that used violence as their principal means.

From the time, in the late 1970s, when autonomous groups began to emerge as more or less regular features of some East European societies, they played a very important role as agents of change. They provided forums for discussion and for checking programs of political strategy and they established networks of support for the goals they were pursuing. They shook the foundations of communist rule by introducing elements into the socio-political order that were incompatible with the existing structure of power. In some cases, they achieved their goals despite their seeming lack of power and the absence of institutionalized channels through which they could articulate their interests. They were the breeding ground for alternative political leaderships, skilled in strategy and organization.

Initially, these autonomous groups were the destabilizing agents that helped to topple communist leaders. Later, they emerged as the stabilizing features of the transition to new, more democratic socio-political orders. Their absence in a country like Romania and their lack of a more lengthy history in a country like Bulgaria deprived the former society of a stable foundation for change and the latter of a more
promising start in the building of democratic institutions.

We have witnessed, thus far, only the initial stages of the transition away from post-totalitarianism and toward democracy in these societies -- stages at which autonomous groups played a very crucial role in toppling established communist rule. We have already seen cleavages and divisions in recent months within the once unified Polish Solidarity movement. We can expect that, in countries where diverse autonomous groups joined together under common banners of unified opposition during parliamentary elections in 1990 (e.g., Bulgaria's Union of Democratic Forces), those groups will likewise split apart to pursue their own, more focused political programs. It is unclear what role will be played in the future by the once illegal autonomous groups of Eastern Europe. In those countries where communist parties were clear losers in freely held elections and where the process of democratization is therefore most fully begun, these same groups may continue to act as agents of change in building the new socio-political order. In the meantime, a similar phenomenon is already in progress in the Soviet Union where countless informal political associations form the "embryos of future political parties" at a time when the Communist Party of the Soviet Union still maintains a monopoly of power. They, too, are currently destabilizing agents that may very well provide the stabilizing force in a transition to a democratic order.
NOTES


3. Ibid.

4. The practice of burning down local communist party headquarters was the basis of Jacek Kuron’s famous statement encouraging the creation of autonomous groups in Poland, in which he said, "Instead of burning committees, build committees."

5. See, for example, Jedrzej Giertych, *Po wypadkach poznańskich: List otwarty do polskiej emigracji*. Londyn: 16, Belmont Road, nakładem autora, 1956; Vladimir Pomir and Iurii Shchekochikhin, "Togda, v


9. Ibid., pp. 70-71.


11. Stephen Ashley, "Reformist Ferment in the Writers' Union," Radio


15. The "Jazz Section" of the Czechoslovak Musicians' Union constituted, since the 1970s, an opposition element within the broader state-sponsored professional association. It did not, however, emerge as an autonomous group, although it functioned as one by the mid-1980s.

16. Personal interview with Wlodzimierz Zbiniewicz, in charge of printing for KOR and later head of Solidarity's propaganda needs in the Pulawy district of Poland, Uppsala, May 1987.

18. The same was true of the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s that used many of the resources of the Southern Baptist Churches for purposes of mobilization.


20. The striking similarities between Gorbachev's reform program and the program put forth during the 1968 "Prague Spring" must have profoundly raised expectations for change among Czechoslovak citizens.


22. Solidarity was legally registered in November 1980 only to have its activities suspended in December 1981 and then banned altogether. It regained the right to legal registration again in April 1989, following the roundtable negotiations.


25. The Consultative Council included members from Poland's opposition who acted in this body as individual citizens rather than as representatives of a broader constituency. Solidarity, as a trade union or social movement, was not represented.


28. Fred Singleton, "Ecological Crisis in Eastern Europe: Do the Greens Threaten the Reds?" Across Frontiers, Summer 1985, pp. 5-10.

29. H. Gordon Skilling, "Independent Currents ...," op. cit., p. 49. Skilling is referring here specifically to Charter 77.
30. In some cases, the existence of autonomous structures radicalized their official counterpart organizations, as was the case with Solidarity and Poland's official communist-sponsored trade unions. During Solidarity's heyday in 1980-81, during the period of normalization in the mid-1980s, and again, in 1989, following the relegalization of Solidarity, the official trade union structures became more radical and outspoken in defense of workers' rights. The government-sponsored unions, after all, were now facing competition for the first time. See, for example, Andrzej Swidlicki, Political Trials in Poland 1981-86. London: Croom Helm, 1988, p. 163. The same was true of the official press in Poland. As underground publications became more and more available to a general public, at least some government-controlled periodicals felt the need to liberalize their censorship laws to counteract the "competition".

31. In the early issues, Robotnik, the clandestine publication of Poland's Free Trade Union Movement, was as much a "How To" manual as a forum for open discussion. In the late 1970s, articles included "How to Print" (on self-publishing techniques), "How to Confront Management", and "How to Construct an Antenna" (for better reception of Radio Free Europe broadcasts).


35. Vaclav Havel's essay on "Living in Truth" best exemplifies this orientation. Of course, not all grassroots movements fighting oppression adopt this strategy, as evidenced by the disinformation campaigns launched by many wartime resistance movements. "Truth", however, proved a very powerful weapon against communism, having great appeal for both East European citizens and Western groups and political institutions.

36. For the entire decade between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, the autonomous groups of Eastern Europe did not conceive of their mission as being one aimed at toppling communism. Their goals, one might say, were more "modest", and their intentions were originally to initiate change within the existing structures. This strategy led to much debate in both East and West on whether communist systems could indeed be reformed.

37. Polish authorities were well aware of Michnik's strategy of using the court as a forum during his trials and thus did not allow him to speak at all in his own defense while being tried in 1985. See Jane Cave, ed., *On Trial in Gdansk: A Transcript of the Proceedings Against Adam Michnik,* Bogdan Lis, Wladyslaw Prasyniuk. Washington, D.C.: The Poland Watch Center, 1986.

39. The Honecker regime reportedly appealed to the Soviet troops stationed in the GDR for assistance in quelling the mounting public unrest and massive demonstrations of October 1989. That assistance was denied.

40. Robert Sharlet argues correctly that, "In the GDR ... religious activism ... serves as a patron and protector of a curious mix of mass political dissent and the youth counterculture. Similarly, in Czechoslovakia, both state-sanctioned religion and the religious underground are loosely confederated with Charter 77, the cynosure of political dissent in the CSSR." See "Human Rights and Wrongs: Dissent and Repression in Eastern Europe," in Nicholas N. Kittrie and Ivan Volgyes, eds., The Uncertain Future: Gorbachev's Eastern Bloc. New York: Paragon House, 1988, p. 95. Still, the point being made here, that Solidarity in Poland formed a unique protective umbrella under which other autonomous groups could emerge and flourish, holds true. One need only consider that the independent trade union movement was a grassroots organization claiming in 1981 some thirty percent of the population of Poland and the majority of citizens in the labor force. Its popularity, even while it was officially banned during most of the 1980s, encouraged and inspired the creation of numerous other groups.

42. H. Gordon Skilling, "Independent Currents...," *op. cit.*, pp. 32-49.


45. Pedro Ramet, "Church and Peace in the GDR," *Problems of Communism*, July-August 1984, pp. 48-57. Ramet suggests that the semi-autonomous peace groups in the GDR began operating under the aegis of the Church as early as the late 1970s.


54. The fact of so many expulsions created debate within the peace movement between those who wished to remain in the GDR and those who possibly viewed their activism as a guaranteed ticket to the West. See Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Nascent Civil Society...," op. cit., pp. 108-109. Also, for a discussion on the use of forced deportation as a countermeasure against dissent, see H. G. Huettich, "Dissent and Systemic Stability in East Germany," Studies in Comparative Communism, vol. XII, no. 2-3, Summer-Autumn, 1979, pp. 254-262. Interestingly, Zhivkov and Ceausescu employed the same, largely effective policy of deporting "dissidents".
55. This is not to say that real tension did not exist at times between the Church and the peace movements it sponsored, with the Church carefully selecting the battles it wished to enter with the government and the movements demanding stricter loyalty to their goals by the Church. Likewise, there were splits, at times, between the Church hierarchy that insisted on adherence to the principles that would benefit the Church in the long-term and guarantee its survival as an institution in that society and the young activist pastors who aligned themselves with the independent movements. See Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Nascent Civil Society . . .," op. cit., pp. 95-99.


61. Ibid.


64. The splits in Solidarity are occurring between Lech Walesa, as Solidarity union leader, and Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, along with other leaders in the Solidarity-led government. Among the major issues was control over the Citizens' Committees.

APPENDIX

AN INTERVIEW WITH LECH WALESŁA

MARCH 21, 1987
Introduction

Shortly after the amnesty of September 11, 1986, the laws prohibiting some of the most common forms of opposition activity in Poland were moved from the criminal code to the administrative code and punishments were set to focus less on jail terms and more on fines and confiscations of tools used to commit the offense. Some of the crimes punishable under this new law include the distribution of illegal publications, membership in or attendance at meetings of illegal associations, and actions intended to provoke public unrest. The maximum punishment now set for these crimes is a three-month prison sentence and a 50,000 zloty fine. While this would seem, on the surface, to be a loosening of the repressive policies Polish authorities have used in the past against opposition activists, it has left Poles fearful of financial ruin for themselves and for their families.

Solidarity leader, Lech Walesa, comments on these changes and the general situation of human rights in Poland today, in a video-taped interview conducted in Gdansk, in March 1987, by the Aurora Foundation. Funds for transcribing, translating and editing this interview were provided, in part, by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research. Portions of the interview were presented at the June 1987 Annual General Meeting of Amnesty International in San Francisco, where Mr. Walesa was honored as an outstanding human rights activist.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH LECH WALESÁ

CHRISTINE M. SADOWSKI:

MR. WALESÁ, THIS YEAR AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS HONORING YOU AS A PERSON WHO HAS FOUGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. WHEN DID YOU FIRST BECOME ACTIVE IN THESE MATTERS?

LECH WALESÁ:

It is difficult for me to say exactly when I began these activities. In the past forty some years of my life, I have gone in different directions. At various times, I have tried ... to defend myself and others when I noticed different types of harm being done. This happened in childhood, when friends handled matters unfairly among themselves or in school when such situations occurred, as they often do in every life and in every country. Exactly when I started to defend human rights — the small ones, the bigger ones and the very largest — I cannot say.
CS: YOU SPENT YOUR ENTIRE LIFE ON THESE MATTERS. PERHAPS YOU
COULD TELL US WHY THIS WAS SO IMPORTANT TO YOU. AFTER ALL,
YOU COULD HAVE CHOSEN NOT TO BE CONCERNED WITH THESE MATTERS
AND LIVED A NORMAL LIFE.

LW: I would say more. If I had not worried about and acted on
these matters, I would have lived a more peaceful and a more
comfortable life because ... when a person begins to defend
the weaker members of society, then the stronger ones always
attempt to show their power. This battle ... is always
fought at a price. That is why I so admire those wonderful
people who fight internationally for human rights, because on
that scale in particular, they can encounter big problems.

But people are born into this — to defend those for
whom such a defense in necessary. When I look at myself and
I look at those great activists, I admire them — those so
much greater than I. I have not done that much, but that is
the way life is sometimes — that good things are attributed
to one person. At this moment, many good things are
attributed to me, even though I find in my midst people who
paid a higher price for the exact same battles fought in
defense of the rights of individuals and social groups.
CS: YOU SPEAK VERY MODESTLY. AFTER ALL, WHEN THE GDANSK AGREEMENTS WERE TO BE SIGNED, IN THE FINAL DAYS OF THE STRIKE, YOU REFUSED TO SIGN THE AGREEMENTS AS LONG AS POLITICAL PRISONERS WERE STILL BEING HELD IN POLAND. WHY WAS THIS SO IMPORTANT TO YOU?

LW: There are all types of games ... and this must be seen as a game — a game with very large stakes. From the point of view of a game, I presented the problem at the very end, when everything else was settled, so that the effect would be greater. But I thought about this even before I thought about the first point of The Agreements ..., about these matters that were most important to me. If you do not present these issues as the most important, many people who do not have to pay the price for human rights might not recognize the issues. That is why, in fighting for ... human rights, one must choose the moment when one can most effectively win the battle in defense of such values.

CS: WHAT SPECIFICALLY DOES "HUMAN RIGHTS" MEAN TO YOU?

LW: That is a very large topic. I have said many times that human rights or democratic rights must be linked with the place, the conditions, the intellectual level [of a society] — the conditions in which the battle for these rights takes place.
Furthermore, the struggle for human rights in our case, in the center of Europe, is so obvious that it is shameful. Those rights that other countries enjoy in Europe and in the rest of the world are not observed in Central Europe: the right to free speech, the right to assemble, to enjoy organizational pluralism. What Western Europe has, we do not have.

Therefore, in speaking about human rights ... we must look at the intellectual level of a country, its needs, its possibilities and only then choose the most effective methods for defending human rights. For me, human rights were at issue even in primary school, in the first grade when someone abused the rights of a good pupil. These are also human rights, but the rights of the little person who is in the first grade.

It is a different battle later when, as adults, we must have pluralistic possibilities, when people should not be imprisoned or repressed for their positions and thoughts and for their non-violent struggle and when, in fact, the more effective arguments should be the ones that win. As we know, in life we have the opposite situation in many instances when thoughts and non-violent struggles for rights are fought off with power and brutality. And that is why we need such wonderful people and such wonderful organizations to help fight for these rights in various areas of the world.
CS: Let us change the topic a little. How many times were you arrested?

LW: I have not counted. I wonder how many more times I will be arrested. I do not work backwards and I do not concern myself with the past. I am concerned with the future. I would like to know how our programs will work out.

I have many thoughts, many ideas and I do not know which ones will come true. This is what fascinates me. What happened in the past, I throw to history, acknowledged or unacknowledged, even though it hurt and even though it was difficult. I am going forward. This is my style.

CS: You mentioned earlier that there are organizations that help a great deal in matters of human rights internationally. If you were the head of a human rights organization, how would you go about helping people fight for human rights?

LW: This is an enormous topic. I am not even sure that I am in a position to answer.... Certainly, I would approach the issues not theoretically, but practically. I do not have much of a theoretical background, but I have a lot of practical experience. I always approach matters, regardless which ones, but these matters in particular, by attempting to understand them — with a willingness to help and to understand. It is most important to understand where this is
occurring, on what level the society is, what are the shortcomings, and what are the weak or sensitive points among those who oppress others or who violate human rights. For every country, for each situation, different methods must be chosen so that they will be more effective.

It seems to me that the methods are not always correctly chosen for the places where these unpleasant things happen. If I were in such an organization, I would try, first of all, to select more effective methods for this battle. These organizations do a tremendous amount, but their work does not always yield the expected results. On the other hand, if these matters were better thought out, these people could work less and accomplish more. And I am the type who wants to work the least hard while accomplishing the most.

This does not mean I have a grudge against anyone. No, no. I do not know these issues well enough. This is just the way I see it. I would not want to offend anyone, since it may seem this way to me simply because I do not understand these matters. This is my point of view. But I have no grudges. I see these people throwing themselves into these matters for others whom they do not even know. This is beautiful, it is wonderful, and it should continue.
CS: WHAT SPECIFICALLY NEEDS TO BE DONE IN POLAND YET, WHERE HUMAN RIGHTS ARE CONCERNED?

LW: You have to remember that given the intellectual level of Polish society, we must assume the major burden in this battle for these rights. This is not always possible. But in Poland, in this place in Europe, with this human consciousness, the major brunt of the burden rests with this society.

This does not mean that international help is not necessary, but the efforts could be more effective. With international solidarity, more can be done in a better way.

In Poland, we are struggling for human rights. There are other places, more difficult places, where international help is crucial. In Poland ... this help is also crucial, but in a different form and at a different intellectual level.

CS: WHAT COULD INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DO TO HELP POLAND?

LW: We have experts in this field — lawyers. In fact, I have a meeting later today with the leader of the human rights group, Mr. [Zbigniew] Romaszewski. His role is to specifically, precisely, point by point, explain these matters. On the other hand, I could do this, but not very precisely. If you would like me to, I am prepared to do
this. Should I do this? Yes.

In Poland, we are fighting for rights which Western Europe and the other world which is on a higher economic and democratic level, already have. Our weak point is the lack of organizational pluralism. The paradox is that we have the widest range of organizations, but these organizations are not independent, self-governing or pluralistic. They operate through consent from above. They were created from above and can be liquidated. In Poland, we must achieve greater independence in many areas — economic, social and political — which will lead us toward greater democratization and, at the same time, create new opportunities for us.

As I said, in Poland the battle occurs at a higher level. The world already sees that we have few prisoners of conscience from this struggle. Other methods are used against us. These new methods are more insidious and more unrestrained. We do not yet have an effective method of defending ourselves because these are new forms. This is really a very high form of struggle and it is a more intellectual than a physical struggle...

In Poland, we must think about how to fight at this higher level ... and how we could fight effectively when these methods against us are unrestrained.

I am speaking here about the taking of cars, apartments, the paying of enormous fines, the creation of false evidence against us, where everyone can be ruined, taking away from people what is most meaningful to them. These are
unrestrained methods for which we do not have a means of defending ourselves. They are also dangerous methods, because they can result in a reversion to a different type of battle. If they [the authorities] take away from someone something for which he has worked all of his life, if [the authorities] take away his apartment or ruin his house or take his car, that person may revert to a more physical level of struggle since he will not have a chance of winning otherwise. One might revert to an uglier level of struggle. We would not want this to happen.

We must ... get some very smart people together so that they can look over this situation and find an effective, peaceful and more cunning and clever means of defending ourselves. That is what I would say.

We do not have these methods yet, but they are being drawn up currently. Many people are working on this — to think and come up with something so that we would be able to fight more effectively, with more unrestrained, though of course, non-violent methods.

I must say that the methods of the struggle in defense of human rights, or maybe the results or the activity of defending human rights, on both sides change. But from the beginning and for centuries, they were similar. When the first individuals started to defend their rights against their oppressors they were executed. At a later period, they were arrested until there were too many arrests and the prisoners had to be released...
In Poland, we also went through these stages. When the first battles for independence took place they were very bloody, people paid with their lives and their health. At a later period, there were arrests. There were many people [arrested] about whom we do not even know. Then our level was raised and then there was the period before and during Solidarity when again a mass of people were imprisoned. But if these people were jailed, [the authorities] could not jail the real criminals and this was also an abnormal situation.

At the same time there was an outcry [from the people] because from nearly every family someone was detained or imprisoned. What kind of a social climate was this in the center of Europe? I am speaking here of many individuals. But we have fewer political prisoners now in Poland, because jails, as such, at our intellectual level of society, are no longer a punishment and they make no sense. The battle has assumed a higher position and that requires that we come up with a higher level of defense.

CS: THE WORLD IS VERY HAPPY WHERE POLAND IS CONCERNED THAT THE LEVEL OF THE BATTLE HAS CHANGED AND THAT THERE ARE NOW FEWER POLITICAL PRISONERS IN POLAND ...

LW: Exactly. This is the major problem to be explained here. Which is better? Certainly the methods used against us now are more insidious. Do these new methods damage a person's
psyche more — or his intellect? Well, I do not know.

Earlier, some people were sitting in jail.... Some of them were really suffering; their families were suffering; they were hungry. But now, they [the authorities] could do the same thing to us with even worse results.... For example, if a person works his entire life, forty years or fifty, and then someone else takes away from him his life's earnings, wouldn't a year in prison be a smaller punishment? A year or two? I do not know; I do not know how to count this or how to measure it.

Western democracies are thrilled because it seems so very simple to them that money can be collected, money can be donated, the fines can be paid, and people will not suffer from this. I myself do not know because maybe these new methods [of repression] will lead to such insidiousness that the system will stop working economically. Instead of jailing the worker, it will levy tremendous fines against him.... Money will be earned, but for such perfidy. The worker will not be working for real reforms or for an effective economy, but only to cover the cost of such human abuse. Instead of increasing prices, they are going to levy million zloty fines against people....

It would be useful to take a close look at this situation. It is a dangerous one and people should not be impressed with Poland because there are no political prisoners. Of course, in Poland there are [fewer] political prisoners but, I repeat, even if someone sat in prison for a
year, that would be less harmful to him than to lose his life's earnings.

CS: MR. WALESA, WHAT ROLE HAS PUBLIC OPINION PLAYED GENERALLY?

LW: It is very good that you raised this question. I must say that right now the most heroic battle of all is taking place in Poland. It is even more heroic than when people were sitting in jail or when we were striking. But the battle is on a completely different level. That other period was more noticeable because people were sitting in jail and the situation was clear to everyone. Or else we were noticeable because we carried big banners or because we had large meetings where people applauded. But now the battle takes place in offices. It is a battle of looking for answers; a battle that is based on quiet or secret meetings. This battle is no longer taking place in the streets because we will not solve these problems in the street. Now we are working in offices. Later our activity will be noticeable. It is so heroic and so difficult and it is exactly at this point that we are less noticeable to the world.

This is the paradox. Public opinion is not prepared for this type of activity and organizations are not prepared for this type of battle and for helping in this type of a struggle. This is a battle that is not very noticeable.
CS: CAN SOMETHING BE DONE TO PUT POLAND BACK INTO THE LIMELIGHT OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS?

LW: Yes, there is something that can be done, but again, this is a situation that depends on us a great deal. We, after all, do not answer or say too much currently. We do not provide evidence, we do not show what is really going on. You would have to look at this issue from both sides, really. It is difficult for others to help us when we do not really know what kind of help we need. But at the same time, if materials were arriving, if people would talk about us in the context of the level of help we need, this would help.

CS: SIR, YOU ONCE SAID THAT SOLIDARITY WAS PHASE ONE AND THAT NOW YOU ARE IN PHASE TWO — WHEN WILL THE THIRD PHASE OCCUR?

LW: That also depends on us and it depends on the international situation. Poland is a labyrinth of abnormalities. People in this country do not know which road in this labyrinth is the correct road and we are looking at this: "Is it this road; is it that road?" we ask. And then we say, "No, not this road. This road is taking us in the wrong direction."

We know that our situation is not normal. But Madam, to make an abnormal person out of a normal person, that is not so hard. But to make a normal person out of an abnormal person, that is very difficult. And this is our situation.
Moreover, we know the types of solutions that have been implemented — economic solutions and political and social— but there are times when those solutions cannot be implemented. It is just like someone once put it very well. He compared fish soup to an aquarium. You can start with an aquarium and make fish soup, but if you start with fish soup, you cannot reconstruct an aquarium. These are the types of issues we are thinking about. Is a particular program possible and how long it will take [to have an effect]. Because even I will agree that if you wait a long time with this fish soup and it cools off and you wait a thousand years, then you can have live fish in there again. But do our problems also have to wait a thousand years? That is how long we have been making this "fish soup". It is going to be hard to come up with live fish here again. But we have to continue trying.

And this is where international organizations come in — so that they can tell us which is the appropriate road, which road is the safe road, which one is peaceful, which one will work out for us.

It seems to me that we have to choose the economic tunnel or road. It seems to me that if things are straightened out economically, then the other roads will also become more normal. Others feel that this will not work at all. They feel that if there is political normality, then the other roads will straighten themselves out. Still others claim that nothing can be done from the lower levels of
society, but that changes must be made at the very top —
that first some government or ministerial changes would be
needed and then everything else would fall into place. So,
you see, these matters are very complicated and that is what
we need help in — help in choosing the correct road.

CS: SIR, WHO SPECIFICALLY COULD HELP YOU?

LW: That is difficult to say. Difficult to say since we, in the
end, are not convinced ourselves. Without some kind of
political changes, we simply cannot move any further than we
have. But I am a practical man and I feel that if we cannot
make political changes, we should make changes economically
— and through economics, I will get to politics. But I do
not know. These are complicated matters.

Wait, there is one more thing that needs to be said.

Because we are behaving the way we are and because there is
Solidarity and a very powerful Solidarity, although it is
organized differently than it was before, that part of the
government toward whom we hold deep grudges is changing. For
example, if we consider the new proposal that there be two
candidates for each position in government, then this is
something new for us. Another proposal is an economic one:
that all Polish enterprises will be able to have up to 50% 
foreign capital investments. This is also something new.
There is also the Consultation Council that has been created.
This council is not what we want but it is something. Or consider the human rights activist who is not detained. You do not get something for nothing. No government gives things for free.

These changes are thanks to the behavior of the society. It is thanks to the behavior of Solidarity and to that international solidarity that forces people who abuse human rights to make certain changes. All of these changes, although they are low-level changes, are changes in the right direction. They are too small, they are too short, but they are changes in the right direction.... This is all happening so slowly that the effects, for which we could be very pleased, will show up in two or three hundred years and we will not be here then.

CS: AND WHAT WOULD SPEED THIS PROCESS UP?

LW: Our own wisdom and international wisdom... We want to be able to show them [the authorities] black on white so that they will have to accept [our proposal] — even if they accept only half of it. If we are going to have only experiments [in Poland], then things are going to change too slowly.
CS: I DO NOT KNOW IF I UNDERSTAND YOU CORRECTLY, BUT ARE YOU SAYING THAT THE WORLD SHOULD SHOUT A LITTLE LOUDER?

LW: Well, yes, but the world has to understand one more thing. Any improvement in democratization or any improvement in an economic situation, helps the people who are shouting — and it does help them. It does not help only us Poles, but it returns to those who are helping us. For example, if we are going to be better off economically, then we are going to be able to contribute more to the world economy. We will be in a better position to help those who are trying to democratize and to help others as well.... Do we understand each other? ... The help that is given returns to those who are doing the helping. It leads to a better situation, more peace in the world, world security, and so on, and then those people can become involved in other places. This is a very complex matter and it is a matter that really serves everyone. Do we understand each other?

CS: UNFORTUNATELY, I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. COULD YOU REPEAT THE LAST POINT YOU WERE MAKING?

LW: When we [Poles] have more, we will have more to share with others.... For now, it is appropriate to help Poland because we do not have enough yet to share with others. Poland is so rich and it is on such a high intellectual level, and we will be in a position to help others. If Poland solves its
human rights problems or if it solves its economic problems, we will be in a position to help other regions where help is needed and where the level is lower than it is in Poland. We can afford to do this. We have the resources and the possibilities to serve someone else and [we do not want] to have to demand that someone serves us.

Do we understand each other?

CS: YES, WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.