

"Dear Dr. Husák"

"Dear Dr. Husák" (April 1975), addressed to Dr. Gustav Husák, who was then the general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, is Havel's first major public statement after being blacklisted in 1969. He describes the circumstances surrounding the writing of this letter in the interview with Jiří Lederer on page 84. The letter was first published in English, in this translation, in Encounter (September 1975). It has subsequently appeared in several anthologies of Czech writing, most recently in Václav Havel or Living in Truth, edited by Jan Vladislav (London: Faber & Faber, 1986). The translator is not identified.

Dear Dr. Husák,

In our offices and factories work goes on, discipline prevails. The efforts of our citizens are yielding visible results in a slowly rising standard of living: people build houses, buy cars, have children, amuse themselves, live their lives.

All this, of course, amounts to very little as a criterion for the success or failure of your policies. After every social upheaval, people invariably come back in the end to their daily labors, for the simple reason that they want to stay alive; they do so for their own sake, after all, not for the sake of this or that team of political leaders.

Not that going to work, doing the shopping, and living their own lives is all that people do.

They do much more than that: they commit themselves to numerous output norms which they then fulfill and over-fulfill; they vote as one man and unanimously elect the candidates proposed to them; they are active in various political organizations; they attend meetings and demonstrations; they declare their support for everything they are supposed to. Nowhere can any sign of dissent be seen from anything that the government does.

These facts, of course, are not to be made light of. One must ask seriously, at this point, whether all this does not confirm your success in achieving the tasks your team set itself-those of winning the public's support and consolidating the situation in the country.

The answer must depend on what we mean by consolidation.

Insofar as it is to be measured solely by statistical returns of various kinds, by official statements and police accounts of the public's political involvement, and so forth, then we can hardly feel any doubt that consolidation has been achieved.

But what if we take consolidation to mean something more, a genuine state of mind in society? Supposing we start to inquire about more durable, perhaps subtler and more imponderable, but nonetheless significant factors, such as what, by way of genuine personal, human experience lies hidden behind all the figures? Supposing we ask, for example, what has been done for the moral and spiritual revival of society, for the enhancement of the truly human dimensions of life, for the elevation of man to a higher degree of dignity, for his truly free and authentic assertion in this world? What do we find when we thus turn our attention from the mere outward manifestations to their inner causes and consequences, their connections and meanings, in a word, to that less obvious plane of reality where those manifestations might actually acquire a general human meaning? Can we, even then, consider our society "consolidated"?

I make so bold as to answer, No; to assert that, for all the outwardly persuasive facts, inwardly our society, far from being a consolidated one, is, on the contrary, plunging ever deeper into a crisis more dangerous, in some respects, than any we can recall in our recent history.

I shall try to justify this assertion.

The basic question one must ask is this: Why are people in fact behaving in the way they do? Why do they do all these things that, taken together, form the impressive image of a totally united society giving total support to its government? For any unprejudiced observer, the answer is, I think, self-evident: They are driven to it by fear.

For fear of losing his job, the schoolteacher teaches things he does not believe; fearing for his future, the pupil repeats them after him; for fear of not being allowed to continue his studies, the young man joins the Youth League and participates in whatever of its activities are necessary; fear that, under the monstrous system of political credits, his son or daughter will not acquire the necessary total of points for enrollment at a school leads the father to take on all manner of responsibilities and "voluntarily" to do everything required. Fear of the consequences of refusal leads people to take part in elections, to vote for the proposed candidates, and to pretend that they regard such ceremonies as genuine elections; out of fear for their livelihood, position, or prospects, they go to meetings, vote for every resolution they have to, or at least keep silent: it is fear that carries them through humiliating acts of self-criticism and penance and the dishonest filling out of a mass of degrading questionnaires; fear that someone might inform against them prevents them from giving public, and often even private, expression to their true opinions. It is the fear of suffering financial reverses and the effort to better themselves and ingratiate themselves with the authorities that in most cases makes working men put their names to "work commitments"; indeed, the same motives often lie behind the establishment of Socialist Labor Brigades, in the clear realization that their chief function is to be mentioned in the appropriate reports to higher levels. Fear causes people to attend all those official celebrations, demonstrations, and marches: Fear of being prevented from continuing their work leads many scientists and artists to give allegiance to ideas they do not in fact accept, to write things they do not agree with or know to be false, to join official organizations or to take part in work of whose value they have the lowest opinion, or to distort and mutilate their own works. In the effort to save themselves, many even report others for doing to them what they themselves have been doing to the people they report.

The fear I am speaking of is not, of course, to be taken in the ordinary psychological sense as a definite, precise emotion. Most of those we see around us are not quaking like aspen leaves: they wear the faces of confident, self-satisfied citizens. We are concerned with fear in a deeper sense, an ethical sense if you will, namely, the more or less conscious participation in the collective awareness of a permanent and ubiquitous danger; anxiety about what is being, or might be, threatened; becoming gradually used to this threat as a substantive part of the actual world; the increasing degree to which, in an ever more skillful and matter-of-fact way, we go in for various kinds of external adaptation as the only effective method of self defense.

Naturally, fear is not the only building block in the present social structure.

Nonetheless, it is the main, the fundamental material, without which not even that surface uniformity, discipline, and unanimity on which official documents base their assertions about the "consolidated" state of affairs in our country could be attained.

The question arises, of course: What are people actually afraid of? Trials? Torture? Loss of property? Deportations? Executions? Certainly not. The most brutal forms of pressure exerted by the authorities upon the public are, fortunately, past history--at least in our circumstances. Today, oppression takes more subtle and selective forms. And even if political trials do not take place today--everyone knows how the authorities manage to manipulate them--they only represent an extreme threat, while the main thrust has moved into the sphere of existential pressure. Which, of course, leaves the core of the matter largely unchanged.

Notoriously, it is not the absolute value of a threat which counts, so much as its relative value. It is not so much what someone objectively loses, as the subjective importance it has for him on the plane on which he lives, with its own scale of values. Thus, if a person today is afraid, say, of losing the chance of working in his own field, this may be a fear equally strong, and productive of the same reactions, as if--in another historical context--he had been threatened with the confiscation of his property. Indeed, the technique of existential pressure is, in a sense, more universal. For there is no one in our country who is not, in a broad sense, existentially vulnerable. Everyone has something to lose and so everyone has reason to be afraid. The range of things one can lose is broad, extending from the manifold privileges of the ruling caste and all the special opportunities afforded to the powerful--such as the enjoyment of undisturbed work, advancement and earning power, the ability to work in one's field, access to higher education--down to the mere possibility of living in that limited degree of legal certainty available to other citizens, instead of finding oneself amongst the special class to whom not even those laws which apply to the rest of the public apply, in other words, among the victims of Czechoslovak political apartheid. Yes, everyone has something to lose. The humblest workman's mate can be shifted to an even more lowly and worse-paid job. Even he can be cruelly punished for speaking his mind at a meeting or in the pub.

This system of existential pressure, embracing the whole of society and every individual in it, either as a specific everyday threat or as a general contingency, could not, of course, work effectively if it were not backed up--exactly like the former, more brutal forms of pressure--by its natural hinterland in the power structure, namely, by that force which renders it comprehensive, complex, and robust: the ubiquitous, omnipotent state police.

For this is the hideous spider whose invisible web runs right through the whole of society; this is the vanishing point where all the lines of fear ultimately intersect; this is the final and irrefutable proof that no citizen can hope to challenge the power of the state. And even if most of the people, most of the time, cannot see this web with their own eyes, nor touch its filaments, even the simplest citizen is well aware of its existence, assumes its silent presence at every moment in every place, and behaves accordingly--behaves, that is, so as to acquit themselves in those hidden eyes and ears. And he knows very well why he must. For the spider can intervene in someone's life without any need to have him in his jaws. There is no need at all actually to be interrogated, charged, brought to trial, or sentenced. For one's superiors are also ensnared in the same web; and at every level where one's fate is decided, there are people collaborating or forced to collaborate with the state police. Thus, the very fact that the state police can intervene in one's life at any time, without his having any chance of resisting, suffices to rob his life of some of its naturalness and authenticity and to turn it into a kind of endless dissimulation.

If it is fear which lies behind people's defensive attempts to preserve what they have, it becomes increasingly apparent that the chief impulses for their aggressive efforts to win what they do not yet possess are selfishness and careerism.

Seldom in recent times, it seems, has a social system offered scope so openly and so brazenly to people willing to support anything as long as it brings them some advantage; to unprincipled and spineless men, prepared to do anything in their craving for power and personal gain; to born lackeys, ready for any humiliation and willing at all

times to sacrifice their neighbors' and their own honor for a chance to ingratiate themselves with those in power.

In view of this, it is not surprising that so many public and influential positions are occupied, more than ever before, by notorious careerists, opportunists, charlatans, and men of dubious record; in short, by typical collaborators, men, that is, with a special gift for persuading themselves at every turn that their dirty work is a way of rescuing something, or, at least, of preventing still worse men from stepping into their shoes. Nor is it surprising, in these circumstances, that corruption among public employees of all kinds, their willingness openly to accept bribes for anything and allow themselves shamelessly to be swayed by whatever considerations their private interests and greed dictate, is more widespread than can be recalled during the last decade.

The number of people who sincerely believe everything that the official propaganda says and who selflessly support the government's authority is smaller than it has ever been. But the number of hypocrites rises steadily: up to a point, every citizen is, in fact, forced to be one.

This dispiriting situation has, of course, its logical causes. Seldom in recent times has a regime cared so little for the real attitudes of outwardly loyal citizens or for the sincerity of their statements. It is enough to observe that no one, in the course of all those self-criticisms and acts of penance, really cares whether people mean what they say, or are only considering their own advantages. In fact, one can safely say that the second assumption is made more or less automatically, without anything immoral being seen in this. Indeed, the prospect of personal advantage is used as the main argument in obtaining such statements. For the most part no one tries to convince the penitent that he was in error or acted wrongly, but simply that he must repent in order to save himself. At the same time, the benefits he stands to gain are colorfully magnified, while the bitter taste, which will remain after the act of penance, is played down as an illusion.

And should some eccentric repent in all sincerity and show it, for example, by refusing the appropriate reward on principle, the regime would, in all probability, treat him with suspicion.

In a way, we are all being publicly bribed. If you accept this or that official position at work--not, of course, as a means of serving your colleagues, but of serving the management--you will be rewarded with such-and-such privileges. If you join the Youth League, you will be given the right and access to such-and-such forms of entertainment. If, as a creative artist, you take part in such-and-such official functions, you will be rewarded with such-and-such genuine creative opportunities. Think what you like in private; as long as you agree in public, refrain from making difficulties, suppress your interest in truth, and silence your conscience, the doors will be wide open to you.

If the principle of outward adaptation is made the keystone to success in society, what sort of human qualities will be encouraged and what sort of people, one may ask, will come to the fore?

Somewhere between the attitude of protecting oneself from the world out of fear, and an aggressive eagerness to conquer the world for one's own benefit, lies a range of feelings which it would be wrong to overlook, because they, too, play a significant role in forming the moral climate of today's "united society": feelings of indifference and everything that goes with them.

It is as though after the shocks of recent history, and the kind of system subsequently established in this country, people had lost all faith in the future, in the possibility of setting public affairs right, in the meaning of a struggle for truth and justice. They shrug off anything that goes beyond their everyday, routine concern for their own livelihood; they seek ways of escape; they succumb to apathy, to indifference toward suprapersonal values and

their fellow men, to spiritual passivity and depression.

And everyone who still tries to resist by, for instance, refusing to adopt the principle of dissimulation as the key to survival, doubting the value of any self-fulfillment purchased at the cost of self-alienation--such a person appears to his ever more indifferent neighbors as an eccentric, a fool, a Don Quixote, and in the end is regarded inevitably with some aversion, like everyone who behaves differently from the rest and in a way which, moreover, threatens to hold up a critical mirror before their eyes. Or, again, those indifferent neighbors may expel such a person from their midst or shun him as required, for appearance' sake while sympathizing with him in secret or in private, hoping to still their conscience by clandestine approval of someone who acts as they themselves should, but cannot.

Paradoxically, though, this indifference has become an active social force. Is it not plain indifference, rather than fear, that brings many to the voting booth, to meetings, to membership in official organizations? Is not the political support enjoyed by the regime to a large degree simply a matter of routine, of habit, of automatism, of laziness behind which lies nothing but total resignation? Participation in political rituals in which no one believes is pointless, but it does ensure a quiet life--and would it be any less pointless not to participate? One would gain nothing, and lose the quiet life in the bargain.

Most people are loath to spend their days in ceaseless conflict with authority, especially when it can only end in the defeat of the isolated individual. So why not do what is required of you? It costs you nothing, and in time you cease to bother about it. It is not worth a moment's thought.

Despair leads to apathy, apathy to conformity, conformity to routine performance--which is then quoted as evidence of "mass political involvement" All this goes to make up the contemporary concept of "normal" behavior--a concept which is, in essence, deeply pessimistic.

The more completely one abandons any hope of general reform, any interest in suprapersonal goals and values, or any chance of exercising influence in an "outward" direction, the more his energy is diverted in the direction of least resistance, i.e., "inward." People today are preoccupied far more with themselves, their families and their homes. It is there that they find rest, there that they can forget the world's folly and freely exercise their creative talents. They fill their homes with all kinds of appliances and pretty things, they try to improve their accommodations, they try to make life pleasant for themselves, building cottages, looking after their cars, taking more interest in food and clothing and domestic comfort. In short, they turn their main attention to the material aspects of their private lives.

Clearly, this social orientation produces favorable economic results. It encourages improvements in the neglected fields of consumer goods production and public services. It helps to raise the general living standard. Economically, it is a significant source of dynamic energy, capable, at least partially, of developing society's material wealth, which the inflexible, bureaucratized, and unproductive state sector of the economy could hardly ever hope to accomplish. (It is enough to compare state and private housing construction as to quantity and quality.)

The authorities welcome and support this spillover of energy into the private sphere.

But why? Because it stimulates economic growth? Certainly, that is one reason. But the whole spirit of current

political propaganda and practice, quietly but systematically applauding this "inward" orientation as the very essence of human fulfillment on earth, shows only too clearly why the authorities really welcome this transfer of energy--they see it for what it really is in its psychological origins: an escape from the public sphere. Rightly divining that such surplus energy, if directed "outward," must sooner or later turn against them--that is, against the particular forms of power they obstinately cling to--they do not hesitate to represent as human life what is really a desperate substitute for living. In the interest of the smooth management of society, then, society's attention is deliberately diverted from itself, that is, from social concerns. By fixing a person's whole attention on his mere consumer interests, it is hoped to render him incapable of realizing the increasing extent to which he has been spiritually, politically, and morally violated. Reducing him to a simple vessel for the ideals of a primitive consumer society is intended to turn him into pliable material for complex manipulation. The danger that he might conceive a longing to fulfill some of the immense and unpredictable potential he has as a human being is to be nipped in the bud by imprisoning him within the wretched range of parts he can play as a consumer, subject to the limitations of a centrally directed market.

All the evidence suggests that the authorities are applying a method quite adequate for dealing with a creature whose only aim is self-preservation. Seeking the path of least resistance, they completely ignore the price that must be paid the harsh assault on human integrity, the brutal castration of man's humanity.

Yet these same authorities obsessively justify themselves with their revolutionary ideology, in which the ideal of man's total liberation has a central place! But what, in fact, has happened to the concept of human personality and its many sided, harmonious, and authentic growth? Of man liberated from the clutches of an alienating social machinery, from a mythical hierarchy of values, formalized freedoms, from the dictatorship of property, the fetish and the might of money? What has happened to the idea that people should live in full enjoyment of social and legal justice, have a creative share in economic and political power, be elevated in human dignity and become truly themselves? Instead of a free share in economic decision making, free participation in political life, and free intellectual advancement, all people are actually offered is a chance freely to choose which washing machine or refrigerator they want to buy.

In the foreground, then, stands the imposing facade of grand humanistic ideals--and behind it crouches the modest family house of a socialist bourgeois. On the one side, bombastic slogans about the unprecedented increase in every sort of freedom and the unique structural variety of life; on the other, unprecedented drabness and the squalor of life reduced to a hunt for consumer goods.

Somewhere at the top of the hierarchy of pressures by which man is maneuvered into becoming an obedient member of a consumer herd, there stands, as I have hinted, a concealed, omnipotent force: the state police. It is no coincidence, I suppose, that this body should so aptly illustrate the gulf that separates the ideological facade from everyday reality. Anyone who has had the bad luck to experience personally the "working style" of that institution must be highly amused at the official explanation of its purpose. Does anyone really believe that that slimy swarm of thousands of petty informers, professional narks, complex-ridden, sly, envious, malevolent petit bourgeois, and bureaucrats, that malodorous agglomeration of treachery, evasion, fraud, gossip, and intrigue "shows the imprint of the working man, guarding the people's government and its revolutionary achievements against its enemies' designs"? For who would be more hostile to a true workers' government--if everything were not upside down--than your petit bourgeois, always ready to oblige and sticking at nothing, soothing his arthritic self-esteem by informing on his fellow citizens, a creature clearly discernible behind the regular procedures of the secret police as the true spiritual author of their "working style"?

It would be hard to explain this whole grotesque contrast between theory and practice, except as a natural consequence of the real mission of the state police today, which is not to protect the free development of man from any assailants, but to protect the assailants from the threat which any real attempt at man's free development poses.

The contrast between the revolutionary teachings about the new man and the new morality, and the shoddy concept of life as consumer bliss, raises the question of why the authorities actually cling so tenaciously to their ideology. Clearly, only because their ideology, as a conventionalized system of ritual communications, assures them the appearance of legitimacy, continuity, and consistency, and acts as a screen of prestige for their pragmatic practice.

The actual aims of this practice do, of course, leave their traces on the official ideology at every point. From the bowels of that infinite mountain of ideological rhetoric by which the authorities ceaselessly try to sway people's minds, and which as its communication value is nil-the public, for the most part, scarcely notices, there emerges one specific and meaningful message, one realistic piece of advice: "Avoid politics if you can; leave it to us! Just do what we tell you, don't try to have deep thoughts, and don't poke your nose into things that don't concern you! Shut up, do your work, look after yourself-and you'll be all right!"

This advice is heeded. That people need to make a living is, after all, the one point on which they can rather easily agree with their government. Why not make good use of it, then? Especially as you have no other choice anyway.

Where is the whole situation which I have tried to outline here ultimately leading?

What, in other words, is the effect on people of a system based on fear and apathy, a system that drives everyone into a foxhole of purely material existence and offers him hypocrisy as the main form of communication with society? To what level is a society reduced by a policy where the only aim is superficial order and general obedience, regardless of by what means and at what price they have been gained?

It needs little imagination to see that such a situation can only lead toward the gradual erosion of all moral standards, the breakdown of all criteria of decency, and the widespread destruction of confidence in the meaning of values such as truth, adherence to principles, sincerity, altruism, dignity, and honor. Amidst a demoralization "in depth," stemming from the loss of hope and the loss of the belief that life has a meaning, life must sink to a biological, vegetable level. It can but confront us once more with that tragic aspect of man's status in modern technological civilization marked by a declining awareness of the absolute, and which I propose to call a "crisis of human identity." For how can the collapse of man's identity be slowed down by a system that so harshly requires a man to be something other than he is?

Order has been established. At the price of a paralysis of the spirit, a deadening of the heart, and devastation of life. Surface "consolidation" has been achieved. At the price of a spiritual and moral crisis in society.

Unfortunately, the worst feature of this crisis is that it keeps deepening. We only need to raise our sights a little above our limited daily perspective in order to realize with horror how hastily we are all abandoning positions which only yesterday we refused to desert. What social conscience only yesterday regarded as improper is

today casually excused; tomorrow it will eventually be thought natural, and the day after be held up as a model of behavior. What yesterday we declared impossible, or at least averred we would never get accustomed to, today we accept, without astonishment, as a fact of life. And, conversely, things that a little while ago we took for granted we now treat as exceptional: and soon--who knows we might think of them as unattainable chimeras.

The changes in our assessment of the "natural" and the "normal," the shifts in moral attitudes in our society over the past few years have been greater than they might appear at first glance. As our insensitivity has increased, so naturally has our ability to discern that insensitivity declined.

The malady has spread, as it were, from the fruit and the foliage to the trunk and roots. The most serious grounds for alarm, then, are the prospects which the present state of affairs opens up for the future.

The main route by which society is inwardly enlarged, enriched, and cultivated is that of coming to know itself in ever greater depth, range, and subtlety.

The main instrument of society's self-knowledge is its culture: culture as a specific field of human activity, influencing the general state of mind--albeit often very indirectly--and at the same time continually subject to its influence.

Where total control over society completely suppresses its differentiated inner development, the first thing to be suppressed regularly is its culture: not just "automatically," as a phenomenon intrinsically opposed to the "spirit" of manipulation, but as a matter of deliberate "programming" inspired by justified anxiety that society be alerted to the extent of its own subjugation through that culture which gives it its self-awareness. It is culture that enables a society to enlarge its liberty and to discover truth--so what appeal can it have for the authorities who are basically concerned with suppressing such values? They recognize only one kind of truth: the kind they need at the given moment. And only one kind of liberty: to proclaim that "truth."

A world where "truth" flourishes not in a dialectic climate of genuine knowledge but in a climate of power interests is a world of mental sterility, petrified dogmas, rigid and unchangeable creeds leading inevitably to creedless despotism.

This is a world of prohibitions and limitations and of orders, a world where cultural policy means primarily the operations of the cultural police force.

Much has been said and written about the peculiar degree of devastation which our present-day culture has reached: about the hundreds of prohibited books and authors and the dozens of liquidated periodicals; about the carving up of publishers' projects and theatre repertoires and the cutting off of all contact with the intellectual community; about the plundering of exhibition halls; about the grotesque range of persecution and discrimination practiced in this field; about the breaking up of all the former artistic associations and countless scholarly institutes and their replacement by dummies run by little gangs of aggressive fanatics, notorious careerists, incorrigible cowards, and incompetent upstarts anxious to seize their opportunity in the general void. Rather than describe all these things again, I will offer some reflections on those deeper aspects of this state of affairs which are germane to the subject of my letter.

In the first place, however bad the present situation, it still does not mean that culture has ceased to exist altogether. Plays are put on, television programs go out every day, and even books get published. But this overt and legal cultural activity, taken as a whole, exhibits one basic feature: an overall externalization due to its being estranged in large measure from its proper substance through its total emasculation as an instrument of human, and, therefore of social, self-awareness. And whenever something of incontestably excellent value does appear—a superb dramatic performance, let us say, to stay in the sphere of art—then it appears, rather, as a phenomenon to be tolerated because of its subtlety and refinement, and hence, from an official point of view, its relative innocuousness as a contribution to social self-awareness. Yet even here, no sooner does that contribution begin to be at all keenly perceived than the authorities start instinctively to defend themselves: there are familiar instances where a good actor was banned, by and large, simply for being too good.

But that is not what concerns me at this point. What interests me is how this externalization works in fields where it is possible to describe the human experience of the world far more explicitly and where the function of promoting social self-awareness is, thus, far more manifestly fulfilled.

For example, suppose a literary work, a play perhaps, undeniably skillful, suggestive, ingenious, meaningful, is published (it does happen from time to time). Whatever the other qualities of the work may be, of one thing we may always be perfectly certain: whether through censorship or self-censorship, because of the writer's character or his self-deception, as a consequence of resignation or of calculation, it will never stray one inch beyond the taboos of a banal, conventional and, hence, basically fraudulent social consciousness that offers and accepts as genuine experience the mere appearance of experience—a concatenation of smooth, hackneyed, superficial trivia of experience; that is, pallid reflections of such aspects of experience as the social consciousness has long since adopted and domesticated. Despite, or rather, because of this fact, there will always be people who find such a work entertaining, exciting, and interesting, although it sheds no light, offers no flash of real knowledge in the sense that it reveals something unknown, expresses something unsaid, or provides new, spontaneous, and effective evidence of things hitherto only guessed at. In short, by imitating the real world, such a work in fact, falsifies the real world. As regards the actual forms this externalization takes, it is no accident that the vat most frequently tapped should be the one which, thanks to its proven harmlessness, enjoys the warmest approval of the authorities in our country, whether bourgeois or proletarian. I refer to the aesthetics of banality, safely housed within the four walls of genial petit bourgeois morality; the sentimental philosophy of kitchen-sink, country-bumpkin earthiness, and the provincial conception of the world based on the belief in its general goodness. I refer to the aesthetic doctrine whose keystone is the cult of right-thinking mediocrity, bedded in hoary national self-satisfaction, guided by the principle that everything must be slick, trivial, and predigested, and culminating in that false optimism which puts the basest interpretation on the dictum that "truth will prevail."

Of works designed to give literary expression to the government's political ideology, there is today—as you must be aware—an extreme scarcity, and those few are clearly, by professional standards, bad ones. This is not merely because there is no one to write them, but also, I am sure, paradoxical as it may appear, because they would not be particularly welcome. For, from the standpoint of actual contemporary attitudes (those of the consumer society, that is), even if such works were available, were professionally competent, and attracted somebody's interest, they would divert too much attention "outwards," rub salt into too many old wounds, provoke through their general and radical political character—too much general and radical political reaction, thus stirring up too many pools that are meant to be left as stagnant as possible. Far more suitable to the real interests of the authorities today is what I have called the aesthetics of banality, which misses the truth much more inconspicuously, acceptably, and plausibly, and (since it is far more digestible for the conventional mind) is far

more suited to the role accorded to culture in the consumer philosophy: not to excite people with the truth, but to reassure them with lies.

This kind of artistic output, of course, has always predominated. But in our country, there had always been some chinks at least through which works of art that could truthfully be said to convey a more genuine kind of human self-awareness reached the public. The road for such works was never particularly smooth. They met resistance not only from the authorities, but from the easygoing inertia of conventional attitudes as well. Yet until recently they had always managed in some mysterious way, by devious paths and seldom without delay, to get through to the individual and to society, and so to fulfill the role of culture as the agent of social self-awareness.

This is all that really matters. This is precisely what I take to be really important. And it is also precisely this that the present government--arguably for the first time since the age of our national revival--has managed to render almost completely impossible, so total is the present system of bureaucratic control of culture, so perfect the surveillance of every chink through which some major work might see the light of day, so greatly does that little band of men, who hold the keys to every door in their own pockets, fear the government and fear art.

You will, of course, appreciate that I am speaking at this moment not of the indexes, listing the names of all creative artists subject to a total or partial ban, but of a much worse list--of that "blank index" which includes, a priori, everything which might contain the spark of a slightly original thought, a perceptive insight, deeper sincerity, an unusual idea, or a suggestive form; I am speaking of that open warrant for the arrest of anything inwardly free and, therefore, in the deepest sense "cultural," I am speaking of the warrant against culture issued by your government.

Once more the question which I have been posing from the start arises. What does it all really mean? Where is it leading? What is it going to do to society?

Once more, I take a particular case. Most of the former cultural periodicals, as we know, have ceased to appear in our country. If any have survived, they have been so made to conform to official policy that they are hardly worth taking seriously.

What has been the effect of that?

At first glance, practically none. The wheels of society continue to go round even without all those literary, artistic, theatrical, philosophical, historical, and other magazines whose number, even while they existed, may never have filled the latent needs of society, but which nevertheless were around and played their part. How many people today still miss those publications? Only the few tens of thousands of people who subscribed to them--a very small fraction of society.

Yet this loss is infinitely deeper and more significant than might appear from the numbers involved. Its real implications are again, of course, hidden, and can hardly be assessed precisely.

The forcible liquidation of such a journal--a theoretical review concerned with the theatre, say--is not just an impoverishment of its particular readers. It is not even merely a severe blow to theatrical culture. It is simultaneously, and above all, the liquidation of a particular organ through which society becomes aware of itself and hence it is an interference, hard to describe in exact terms, in the complex system of circulation, exchange,

and conversion of nutrients that maintain life in that many layered organism which is society today. It is a blow against the natural dynamic of the processes going on within that organism; a disturbance of the balanced interplay of all its many functions, an interplay reflecting the level of complexity reached by society's anatomy. And just as the chronic deficiency of a vitamin (amounting in quantitative terms only to a negligible fraction of the human diet) can make a person ill, so, in the long run, the loss of a single periodical can cause the social organism far more damage than would appear at first sight. And what if the loss involves not just one periodical, but virtually all?

It is easy to show that the real importance of knowledge, thought, and creation is not limited, in the stratified world of a civilized society, to the significance these things have for the particular circle of people who are primarily, directly and, as it were, physically involved with them, either actively or passively. This is always a small group, especially in the sciences. Yet the knowledge in question, conveyed through however many intermediaries, may in the end profoundly affect the whole society, just as politics, including the nuclear threat, physically concerns each one of us, even though most of us have had no experience of the speculations in theoretical physics which led to the manufacture of the atom bomb. That the same holds for nonspecific knowledge is shown by many historic instances of an unprecedented cultural, political, and moral upsurge throughout society, where the original nucleus of crystallization, the catalyst, was an act of social self-awareness carried out, and indeed directly and "physically" perceived, only by a small and exclusive circle. Even subsequently, that act may have remained outside the apperception of society at large, yet it was still an indispensable condition of its upsurge. For we never know when some inconspicuous spark of knowledge, struck within range of the few brain cells, as it were, specially adapted for the organism's self awareness, may suddenly light up the road for the whole of society, without society ever realizing, perhaps, how it came to see the road. But that is far from being the whole story. For even those other countless flashes of knowledge which never illuminate the path ahead for society as a whole have their deep social importance, if only through the mere fact that they happened; that they might have cast light; that in their very occurrence they fulfilled a certain range of society's potentialities--either its creative powers, or simply its liberties; they, too, help to make and maintain a climate of civilization without which none of the more illuminating flashes could ever occur.

In short, the space within which spiritual self-awareness operates is indivisible; the cutting of a single thread must injure the coherence of the whole network, and this itself showed the remarkable interdependence of all those fine processes in the social organism that I spoke of, the transcendent importance of each one of them, and hence the transcendent destructiveness wrought by its disruption.

I would not wish to reduce everything to this single and still relatively minor aspect of the problem. Still, does it not in itself confirm the deeply injurious influence on the general spiritual and moral state of society which the "warrant against culture" already has and will have in future, even though its immediate impact is only on a limited number of heads?

If not a single new Czech novel, of which one could safely say that it enlarges our experience of the world, has appeared in recent years in the bookshops, this will certainly have no public effect. Readers are not going to demonstrate in the streets and, in the end, you can always find something to read. But who will dare assess the real significance of this fact for Czech society? Who knows how the gap will affect the spiritual and moral climate of the years to come? How far will it weaken our ability to know ourselves? How deeply will such an absence of cultural self-knowledge brand those whose self-knowing begins only today or tomorrow? What mounds of mystification, slowly forming in the general cultural consciousness, will need to be chipped away?

How far back will one need to go? Who can tell which people will still find the strength to light new fires of truth, when, how, and from what resources, once there has been such thorough wastage not only of the fuel, but of the very feeling that it can be done?

A few novels of the kind absent from the bookshops do nevertheless exist: they circulate in manuscript. In this respect, the situation is not yet hopeless: it follows from everything I have said that if such a novel, over the years, remained unknown to all but twenty people, the fact of its existence would still be important. It means something that there is such a book, that it could be written at all, that it is alive in at least one tiny area of the cultural consciousness. But what about the fields in which it is impossible to work, except through the so-called legal channels? How can one estimate the damage already done, and still to be done, by the strangling of every interesting development in the stage and cinema, whose role as social stimuli is so specific? How much greater still may be the long-term effect of the vacuum in the humanities and in the theory and practice of the social sciences? Who dares measure the consequences of the violent interruption of the long processes of self-knowledge in ontology, ethics, and historiography, dependent as they are on access to the normal circulation of information, ideas, discoveries, and values, the public crystallization of attitudes?

The overall question, then, is this: What profound intellectual and moral impotence will the nation suffer tomorrow, following the castration of its culture today?

I fear that the baneful effects on society will outlast by many years the particular political interests that gave rise to them. So much more guilty, in the eyes of history, are those who have sacrificed the country's spiritual future for the sake of their present power interests.

Just as the constant increase of entropy is the basic law of the universe, so it is the basic law of life to be ever more highly structured and to struggle against entropy.

Life rebels against all uniformity and leveling; its aim is not sameness, but variety, the restlessness of transcendence, the adventure of novelty and rebellion against the status quo. An essential condition for its enhancement is the secret constantly made manifest.

On the other hand, the essence of authority (whose aim is reduced to protecting its own permanence by forcibly imposing the uniformity of perpetual consent) consists basically in a distrust of all variety, uniqueness, and transcendence; in an aversion to everything unknown, impalpable, and currently obscure; in a proclivity for the uniform, the identical, and the inert; in deep affection for the status quo. In it, the mechanical spirit prevails over the vital. The order it strives for is no frank quest for ever higher forms of social self-organization, equivalent to its evolving complexity of structure, but, on the contrary, a decline toward that "state of maximum probability" representing the climax of entropy. Following the direction of entropy, it goes against the direction of life.

In a person's life, as we know, there is a moment when the complexity of structure begins suddenly to decline and his path turns in the direction of entropy. This is the moment when he, too, succumbs to the general law of the universe: the moment of death.

Somewhere at the bottom of every political authority which has chosen the path to entropy (and would like to treat the individual as a computer into which any program can be fed with the assurance that he will carry it out), there lies hidden the death principle. There is an odor of death even in the notion of "order" which such an authority puts into practice and which sees every manifestation of genuine life, every exceptional deed, individual expression, thought, every unusual idea or wish, as a red light signaling confusion, chaos, and anarchy.

The entire political practice of the present regime, as I have tried to outline it here step by step, confirms that those concepts which were always crucial for its program--order, calm, consolidation, "guiding the nation out of

its crisis," "halting disruption," "assuaging hot tempers" and so on--have finally acquired the same lethal meaning that they have for every regime committed to entropy.

True enough, order prevails: a bureaucratic order of gray monotony that stifles all individuality; of mechanical precision that suppresses everything of unique quality; of musty inertia that excludes the transcendent. What prevails is order without life.

True enough, the country is calm. Calm as a morgue or a grave, would you not say?

In a society which is really alive, something is always happening. The interplay of current activities and events, of overt and concealed movement, produces a constant succession of unique situations which provoke further and fresh movement. The mysterious, vital polarity of the continuous and the changing, the regular and the random, the foreseen and the unexpected, has its effect in the time dimension and is borne out in the flow of events. The more highly structured the life of a society, the more highly structured its time dimension, and the more prominent the element of uniqueness and unrepeatability within the time flow. This, in turn, of course, makes it easier to reflect its sequential character, to represent it, that is, as an irreversible stream of non-interchangeable situations, and so, in retrospect, to understand better whatever is governed by regular laws in society. The richer the life society lives, then, the better it perceives the dimension of social time, the dimension of history.

In other words, wherever there is room for social activity, room is created for a social memory as well. Any society that is alive is a society with a history.

If the element of continuity and causality is so vitally linked in history with the element of unrepeatability and unpredictability, we may well ask how true history--that inextinguishable source of "chaos," fountainhead of unrest, and slap in the face to law and order--can ever exist in a world ruled by an "entropic" regime.

The answer is plain: it cannot. And, indeed, it does not on the surface, anyway. Under such a regime, the elimination of life in the proper sense brings social time to a halt, so that history disappears from its purview.

In our own country, too, one has the impression that for some time there has been no history. Slowly but surely, we are losing the sense of time. We begin to forget what happened when, what came earlier and what later, and the feeling that it really does not matter overwhelms us. As uniqueness disappears from the flow of events, so does continuity; everything merges into the single gray image of one and the same cycle and we say, "There is nothing happening." Here, too, a deadly order has been imposed: all activity is completely organized and so completely deadened. The deadening of the sense of unfolding time in society inevitably kills it in private life as well. No longer backed by social history or the history of the individual within it, private life declines to a prehistoric level where time derives its only rhythm from such events as birth, marriage, and death.

The loss of the sense of social time seems, in every way, to cast society back into the primeval state where, for thousands of years, humanity could get no further in measuring it than by the cosmic and climatic pattern of endlessly repeated annual seasons and the religious rites associated with them.

The gap left by the disquieting dimension of history has, naturally, to be filled. So the disorder of real history is replaced by the orderliness of pseudo-history, whose author is not the life of society, but an official planner. Instead of events, we are offered nonevents; we live from anniversary to anniversary, from celebration to

celebration, from parade to parade, from a unanimous congress to unanimous elections and back again; from a Press Day to an Artillery Day, and vice versa. It is no coincidence that, thanks to this substitution for history, we are able to review everything that is happening in society, past and future, by simply glancing at the calendar. And the notoriously Familiar character of the recurrent rituals makes such information quite as adequate as if we had been present at the events themselves.

What we have, then, is perfect order--but at the cost of reverting to prehistory. Even so, we must enter a caveat: whereas for our ancestors the repeated rituals always had a deep existential meaning, for us they are merely a routine performed for its own sake. The government keeps them going to maintain the impression that history is moving. The public goes through the motions to keep out of trouble.

An "entropic" regime has one means of increasing the general entropy within its own sphere of influence, namely, by tightening its own central control, rendering itself more monolithic, and enclosing society in a straitjacket of one-dimensional manipulation. But with every step it takes in this direction, it inevitably increases its own entropy too.

In an effort to immobilize the world, it immobilizes itself, undermining its own ability to cope with anything new or to resist the natural currents of life. The "entropic" regime is, thus, doomed to become the victim of its own lethal principle, and the most vulnerable victim at that, thanks to the absence of any impulse within its own structure that could, as it were, make it face up to itself. Life, by contrast, with its irrepressible urge to oppose entropy, is able all the more successfully and inventively to resist being violated, the faster the violating authority succumbs to its own sclerosis.

In trying to paralyze life, then, the authorities paralyze themselves and, in the long run, make themselves incapable of paralyzing life.

In other words, life may be subjected to a prolonged and thorough process of violation, enfeeblement, and anesthesia. Yet, in the end, it cannot be permanently halted. Albeit quietly, covertly, and slowly, it nevertheless goes on. Though it be estranged from itself a thousand times, it always manages in some way to recuperate; however violently ravished, it always survives, in the end, the power which ravished it. It cannot be otherwise, in view of the profoundly ambivalent nature of every "entropic" authority, which can only suppress life if there is life to suppress and so, in the last resort, depends for its own existence on life, whereas life in no way depends on it. The only force that can truly destroy life on our planet is the force which knows no compromise: the universal validity of the second law of thermodynamics.

If life cannot be destroyed for good, then neither can history be brought entirely to a halt. A secret streamlet trickles on beneath the heavy cover of inertia and pseudo-events, slowly and inconspicuously undercutting it. It may be a long process, but one day it must happen: the cover will no longer hold and will start to crack.

This is the moment when once more something visibly begins to happen, something truly new and unique, something unscheduled in the official calendar of "happenings," something that makes us no longer indifferent to what occurs and when--something truly historic, in the sense that history again demands to be heard.

But how, in our particular circumstances, could it come about that history "demands to be heard"? What does such a prospect really imply?

I am neither historian nor prophet, yet there are some observations touching on the structure of these 'moments' which one cannot avoid making.

Where there is, in some degree, open competition for power as the only real guarantee of public control over its exercise and, in the last resort, the only guarantee of free speech, the political authorities must willy-nilly participate in some kind of permanent and overt dialogue with the life of society. They are forced continually to wrestle with all kinds of questions which life puts to them. Where no such competition exists and freedom of speech is, therefore, of necessity sooner or later suppressed--as is the case with every "entropic" regime--the authorities, instead of adapting themselves to life, try to adapt life to themselves. Instead of coping openly and continually with real conflicts, demands, and issues, they simply draw a veil over them. Yet somewhere under this cover, these conflicts and demands continue, grow, and multiply, only to burst forth when the moment arrives when the cover can no longer hold them down. This is the moment when the dead weight of inertia crumbles and history steps out again into the arena.

And what happens after that?

The authorities are certainly still strong enough to prevent those vital conflicts from issuing in the shape of open discussion or open rivalry for power. But they have no longer the strength to resist this pressure altogether. So life vents itself where it can--in the secret corridors of power, where it can insist on secret discussion and finally on secret competition. For this, of course, the authorities are unprepared: any substantive dialogue with life is outside their range of competence. So they panic. Life sows confusion in their council chambers in the shape of personal quarrels, intrigues, pitfalls, and confrontations. It even infects, as it were, their own representatives: the death mask of impersonality that their officials wore to confirm their identity with the monolith of power is suddenly dropped, revealing live people competing for power in the most "human" way and struggling in self-defense, one against the other. This is the notorious moment for palace revolutions and putsches, for sudden and outwardly mystifying changes of portfolio and changes of key points in set speeches, the moment when real or construed conspiracies and secret centers are revealed, the moment when real or imaginary crimes are made known and ancient guilt unearthed, the moment for mutual dismissals from office, mutual denigration, and perhaps even arrests and trials. Whereas before every man in authority had spoken the same language, used the same clichés, applauded the successful fulfillment of the same targets, now suddenly the monolith of power breaks down into distinguishable persons, still speaking the same language, but using it to make personal attacks on one another. And we learn with astonishment that some of them--those, that is, who lost in the secret struggle for power--had never taken their targets seriously and never successfully fulfilled them far from it--whereas others, the winners--had really meant what they said and are alone capable of achieving their aims.

The more rational the construction of the official calendar of nonevents over the years, the more irrational the effect of a sudden irruption of genuine history. All its long-suppressed elements of unrepeatability, uniqueness, and incalculability, all its long-denied mysteries, come rushing through the breach. Where for years we had been denied the slightest, most ordinary surprise, life is now one huge surprise--and it is well worth it. The whole disorderliness of history, concealed under artificial order for years, suddenly spurts out.

How well we know all this! How often we have witnessed it in our part of the world! The machine that worked for years to apparent perfection, faultlessly, without a hitch, falls apart overnight. The system that seemed likely to reign unchanged, world without end, since nothing could call its power in question amid all those unanimous votes and elections, is shattered without warning. And, to our amazement, we find that nothing was the way we

had thought it was.

The moment when such a tornado whirls through the musty edifice of petrified power structures is, of course, far from being just a source of amusement for all of us who are outside the ramparts of authority. For we, too, are always involved, albeit indirectly. Is it not the quiet perennial pressure of life, the ceaselessly resisted, but finally irresistible demands and interests of all society, its conflicts and its tensions, which ever and again spoke the foundations of power? No wonder society continually reawakens at such moments, attaches itself to them, receives them with great alertness, gets excited by them, and seeks to exploit them! In almost every case, such tremors provoke hopes or fears of one kind or another, create--or seem to create--scope for the realization of life's various impulses and ambitions, and accelerate all kinds of movements within society.

Yet, in almost every case, it is equally true that this situation, owing to the basically unnatural structure of the kind of confrontation with life which such shakeups of power bring about, carries with it many incalculable risks.

I shall try to illuminate further one such risk.

If every day someone takes orders in silence from an incompetent superior, if every day he solemnly performs ritual acts which he privately finds ridiculous, if he unhesitatingly gives answers to questionnaires which are contrary to his real opinions and is prepared to deny himself in public, if he sees no difficulty in feigning sympathy or even affection where, in fact, he feels only indifference or aversion, it still does not mean that he has entirely lost the use of one of the basic human senses, namely, the sense of dignity.

On the contrary: even if they never speak of it, people have a very acute appreciation of the price they have paid for outward peace and quiet: the permanent humiliation of their human dignity. The less direct resistance they put up to it comforting themselves by driving it from their mind and deceiving themselves with the thought that it is of no account, or else simply gritting their teeth--the deeper the experience etches itself into their emotional memory. The man who can resist humiliation can quickly forget it; but the man who can long tolerate it must long remember it. In actual fact, then, nothing remains forgotten. All the fear one has endured, the dissimulation one has been forced into, all the painful and degrading buffoonery, and, worst of all, perhaps, the feeling of having displayed one's cowardice--all this settles and accumulates somewhere in the bottom of our social consciousness, quietly fermenting. Clearly, this is no healthy situation. Left untreated, the abscesses suppurate; the pus cannot escape from the body, and the malady spreads throughout the organism. The natural human emotion is denied the process of objectification and instead, caged up over long periods in the emotional memory, is gradually deformed into a sick cramp, into a toxic substance not unlike the carbon monoxide produced by incomplete combustion.

No wonder, then, that when the crust cracks and the lava of life rolls out, there appear not only well-considered attempts to rectify old wrongs, not only searchings for truth and for reforms matching life's needs, but also symptoms of bilious hatred, vengeful wrath, and a feverish desire for immediate compensation for all the degradation endured. (The impulsive and often wayward forms of this desire may also spring largely from a vague impression that the whole outbreak has come too late, at a time when it has lost its meaning, having no longer any immediate motive and so carrying no immediate risk, when it is actually just an ersatz for something that should have happened in quite a different context.)

No wonder, again, that the men in power, accustomed for years to absolute agreement, unanimous and

unreserved support, and a total unity of total pretense, are so shocked by the upsurge of suppressed feelings at such a moment that they feel exposed to such an unheard-of threat and, in this mood (assuming themselves to be the sole guarantors of the world's survival), detect such an unprecedented threat to the rest of the world, too, that they do not hesitate to call upon millions of foreign soldiers to save both themselves and the world.

We experienced one such explosion not long ago. Those who had spent years humiliating and insulting people and were then so shocked when those people tried to raise their own voices, now label the whole episode an "outbreak of passions." And what, pray, were the passions that broke out? Those who know what protracted and thoroughgoing humiliations had preceded the explosion, and who understand the psycho-social mechanics of the subsequent reaction to them should be more surprised at the relatively calm, objective and, indeed, loyal form which the explosion took. Yet, as everyone knows, we had to pay a cruel price for that moment of truth.

The authorities in power today are profoundly different from those who ruled prior to that recent explosion. Not only because the latter were, so to speak, "originals" and their successors a mere formalized imitation, incapable of reflecting the extent to which the "originals" had meanwhile lost their mystique, but primarily for another reason.

For whereas the earlier version rested on a genuine and not inconsiderable social basis derived from the trustful support accorded, though in declining measure, by one part of the population, and on the equally genuine and considerable attractiveness (which also gradually evaporated) of the social benefits it originally promised, today's regime rests solely on the ruling minority's instinct for self preservation and on the fear of the ruled majority.

In these circumstances, it is hard to foresee all the feasible scenarios for a future "moment of truth": to foresee how such a complex and undisguised degradation of the whole of society might one day demand restitution. And it is quite impossible to estimate the scope and depth of the tragic consequences which such a moment might inflict, perhaps must inflict, on our two nations.

In this context, it is amazing that a government which advertises itself as the most scientific on record is unable to grasp the elementary rules of its own operations or to learn from its own past.

I have made it clear that I have no fear of life in Czechoslovakia coming to a halt, or of history being suspended forever with the accession to power of the present leaders. Every situation in history and every epoch have been succeeded by a fresh situation and a new epoch, and for better or worse, the new ones have always been quite remote from the expectations of the organizers and rulers of the preceding period.

What I am afraid of is something else. The whole of this letter is concerned, in fact, with what I really fear--the pointlessly harsh and long-lasting consequences which the present violent abuses will have for our nations. I fear the price we are all bound to pay for the drastic suppression of history, the cruel and needless banishment of life into the underground of society and the depths of the human soul, the new compulsory deferment of every opportunity for society to live in anything like a natural way. And perhaps it is apparent from what I wrote a little way back that I am not only worried about our current payments in terms of everyday bitterness at the spoliation of society and human degradation, or about the heavy tax we shall have to pay in the long-lasting spiritual and moral decline of society. I am also concerned with the scarcely calculable surcharge which may be imposed on us when the moment next arrives for life and history to demand their due.

The degree of responsibility a political leader bears for the condition of his country must always vary and,

obviously, can never be absolute. He never rules alone, and so some portion of responsibility rests on those who surround him. No country exists in a vacuum, so its policies are in some way always influenced by those of other countries. Clearly the previous rulers always have much to answer for, since it was their policies which predetermined the present situation. The public, too, has much to answer for, both individually, through the daily personal decisions of each responsible human being which went to create the total state of affairs, or collectively, as a socio-historic whole, limited by circumstances and in its turn limiting those circumstances.

Despite these qualifications, which naturally apply in our current situation as in any other, your responsibility as a political leader is still a great one. You help to determine the climate in which we all have to live and can therefore directly influence the final size of the bill our society will be paying for today's process of consolidation.

The Czechs and Slovaks, like any other nation, harbor within themselves simultaneously the most disparate potentialities. We have had, still have, and will continue to have our heroes, and, equally, our informers and traitors. We are capable of unleashing our imagination and creativity, of rising spiritually and morally to unexpected heights, of fighting for the truth and sacrificing ourselves for others.

But it lies in us equally to succumb to total apathy, to take no interest in anything but our bellies, and to spend our time tripping one another up. And though human souls are far from being mere pint pots that anything can be poured into (note the arrogant implications of that dreadful phrase so frequent in official speeches, when it is complained that "we"--that is, "the government"--find that such-and-such ideas are being instilled into people's heads), it depends, nevertheless, very much on the leaders which of these contrary tendencies that slumber in society will be mobilized, which set of potentialities will be given the chance of fulfillment, and which will be suppressed.

So far, it is the worst in us which is being systematically activated and enlarged--egotism, hypocrisy, indifference, cowardice, fear, resignation, and the desire to escape every personal responsibility, regardless of the general consequences.

Yet even today's national leadership has the opportunity to influence society by its policies in such a way as to encourage not the worse side of us, but the better.

So far, you and your government have chosen the easy way out for yourselves, and the most dangerous road for society: the path of inner decay for the sake of outward appearances; of deadening life for the sake of increasing uniformity; of deepening the spiritual and moral crisis of our society, and ceaselessly degrading human dignity, for the puny sake of protecting your own power.

Yet, even within the given limitations, you have the chance to do much toward at least a relative improvement of the situation. This might be a more strenuous and less gratifying way, whose benefits would not be immediately obvious and which would meet with resistance here and there. But in the light of our society's true interests and prospects, this way would be vastly the more meaningful one.

As a citizen of this country, I hereby request, openly and publicly, that you and the leading representatives of the present regime consider seriously the matters to which I have tried to draw your attention, that you assess in their light the degree of your historic responsibility, and act accordingly.

April 1975