
EAST & WEST

Lessons of Prague

A Conversation with

EDUARD GOLDSTÜCKER

PROFESSOR GOLDSTÜCKER, three years ago in March 1968, you told us that the Czechoslovak movement might at worst suffer setbacks, but it could never again be completely crushed or wiped out of history. But in Czechoslovakia the movement for a socialist democracy has been crushed.

GOLDSTÜCKER: From the historical point of view, the future historian of the socialist revolution will put the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 on the same level as, say, the Paris Commune of 1871, which also lasted a very short time, was crushed, but nevertheless retained its significance as the prologue to the whole revolutionary socialist movement.

IT IS THREE YEARS since the Soviet military invasion of Czechoslovakia put a sudden and dramatic end to the "Prague Spring," the historic attempt to give socialism "a human face." Eduard Goldstücker was one of the leading figures in that movement, and in this interview (with two "Spiegel" editors, Fritjof Meyer and Klaus Reinhardt) he tries to reflect on the lessons to be learned. Professor Goldstücker is now a refugee in England, lecturing at the University of Sussex. It is the second time he has gone into exile, the first being in 1939 when he escaped from the Nazi occupation of his country (his family perished in the concentration camp of Auschwitz). He studied in Oxford, and after the war returned to his native Prague. He first served as the Czech Ambassador to Israel, and then during the Slansky Trials was condemned by the Stalinists to life-long imprisonment. He was "rehabilitated" in 1956, and subsequently became Rector of the Charles University as well as a leading literary figure (Chairman of the Writers Union and the "rehabilitator" of Franz Kafka as a Czech man of letters). He has since been officially attacked, denounced, and excommunicated by the present government under Gustav Husak, with whom he worked during the "Prague Spring." But he would, as he says, "go back immediately—if the direction of 1968, so violently interrupted, becomes possible again. . . ."

—So you regard the Prague model as still relevant?

GOLDSTÜCKER: If you consider only two documents of the time of the so-called Prague spring, the April programme of action of the Communist Party and the draft party constitution—those two documents will remain as models. The problem has been posed, and it becomes more urgent from day to day. Look at developments in Poland.

—The intellectuals who assumed the leadership in the "Prague Spring" did not appear at Gdansk and Gdynia. There the working class acted by itself.

GOLDSTÜCKER: Nevertheless it has been shown yet again that the lack of democracy in socialist society necessarily leads to crises. That is a terrible tragedy. Gomulka was a great political figure, a great tribune of the people, but he forgot he was ruling over living human beings, and he broke off communication with those in whose name he ruled and whose vital interests he had undertaken to fulfil. His successor Gierek talks of the necessity of democratisation.

—And can the Prague experiences serve as a model for that?

GOLDSTÜCKER: Socialism in Europe has only two alternatives: either it finds the path to which we showed the way in 1968 or it runs the risk of exposing itself to catastrophic developments. The experiences of Czechoslovakia in 1968 will be harked back to in all future attempts to solve the vital questions of socialism.

—That sounds a little euphoric. . . .

GOLDSTÜCKER: I have also left open the possibility of a pessimistic alternative. When the Moscow leadership and its allies crushed the Czechoslovak experiment beneath their tanks, they crushed their own future too. That is the most absurd thing that could happen, that the so-called "ruling working class" should be shooting at itself, as on the streets of Danzig (Gdansk). . . .

—But then the working class rules neither in Poland, nor in Czechoslovakia, nor in the Soviet Union.

GOLDSTÜCKER: That is why I say that the conflict between ideology and reality is becoming plain for all to see. From the beginning of the 1930s, the unemployment years, one of our most effective arguments in the Communist

Party in Czechoslovakia was that at that time there were instances in which demonstrations by workers and unemployed culminated in shots being fired and a few workers were killed. To the whole Czechoslovak working class that served as the most terrible proof of the suppression of the workers. And now such things happen in a socialist country.

—If the only outcome of the Prague Spring is that it has revealed the social conditions existing in the socialist countries—is not that a very modest achievement?

GOLDSTÜCKER: For the future it is a very important achievement. Because now no one can claim ignorance of what conditions are like. During the Stalinist period in the '30s we Communists did not all really know what was happening. We grew up in a world in which the Soviet Union was the only socialist country, as the result of a great revolution, the moral prestige of which was very high. We believed it to be our duty to do everything in our power to defend the Soviet Union, as the country that was the model of socialism and was showing the way to the working class of the whole world, and as a result of that attitude we took no notice of criticism, which we regarded as hostile propaganda.

—Even when the criticism came from comrades?

GOLDSTÜCKER: When that happened they ceased to be comrades and became class enemies. Things happened that were bound to make us think. But when you have absolute trust you look for arguments to show the correctness of your position and, when you have to choose between the individual and the Party, you look for arguments to show that the Party has all the right on its side as against the individual.

—When did you first realise that the Party was not always right?

GOLDSTÜCKER: In 1951, when my closest friends, whom I knew to be honourable and upright comrades, were arrested. But even then I tried to persuade myself that the Party must know what it was doing, and that no doubt there were facts unknown to me that justified what it was doing.

—It is surprising that an intellectual who is in a position to analyse, and is trained in using his critical intelligence, should be prepared to admit that an anonymous organisation is right even against his own judgment.

GOLDSTÜCKER: Your discomfort grows, but again and again you suppress it, telling yourself that the Party knows more than you do, just as they said it of God in the Middle Ages. There are still many, particularly older Communists in the West, who say that whatever the Soviet Union does is right, because it knows what it is doing, and they trust it. At the end of 1968, after the military intervention in Czechoslovakia, at least one third of the French Communists presumably thought on those lines.

—When did you yourself stop thinking on those lines?

GOLDSTÜCKER: When I was arrested in 1951 because of alleged crimes that in my wildest fantasy I could not have imagined, still less committed. And then, through the whole course of my interrogations spread over eighteen months, I realised that the Party was not concerned with truth but with certain measures that in reality were quite simply intended to deceive, to convince public opinion of something that was an obvious lie. I realised that this system, that I had held to be the highest level of truth attained by humanity, used lies as the basis of its propaganda and its policy.

—Still, there have been Communists who maintained their faith in the Party even under torture.

GOLDSTÜCKER: I kept my faith in the Party, because I believed this to be a deformation and that it possessed sufficient strength for a regeneration that would one day come to the fore. The Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956 confirmed me in this belief, and what happened in Czechoslovakia up to August 1968 did the same.

—But if the section of society that has the use of the tools of scepticism and criticism and analysis, if the intellectuals, of all people, are susceptible to putting their trust and faith in an anonymous force—the Party—are they really qualified to rid socialism of its perversions and regenerate it on democratic lines?

GOLDSTÜCKER: In my view the intellectuals can play a very important part, but—and I always said this to the radical students—they do not have the strength to bring about social changes. In making articulate what is going on in society they can play a part that must not be underrated; they are an important catalytic agent. A new level of consciousness must be created. But the force that is able to bring

about real social changes is the working class. Real social changes can be brought about only if the intellectuals unite with it.

DO YOU THINK that intellectuals have a higher level of social consciousness than the proletariat?

GOLDSTÜCKER: Yes.

—Where do they get it from?

GOLDSTÜCKER: Well, their role in society is to analyse and reflect and formulate the results.

—If social consciousness (including the higher level of social consciousness) is the result of social being, what is the being that brings the intellectual to his state of higher consciousness?

GOLDSTÜCKER: To realise themselves, to be able to play their part, so to speak, they have to break through the all too narrow boundaries of fulfilling their social functions. Realisation of this limitation is always relative to what I call the level of social consciousness, the level of social consciousness already attained in the society. When they compare that level with its concrete possibilities they arrive at a borderline situation.

—You mean that in that state of consciousness intellectuals are more strongly committed to tomorrow and "the future" than they are to today and "the present"?

GOLDSTÜCKER: If I become conscious today that I cannot do what in my opinion ought to be done, that leads me to action, in order to make certain things increasingly possible. There is no sharp dividing line. One of the greatest and most fearful problems of the whole of present-day humanity is that the mass of knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, while social systems are so constituted that this knowledge is only very slowly adapted to social life. The gap is continually widening. The victorious social system will be the one which most quickly and thoroughly succeeds in transforming this theoretical knowledge into social practice.

—Do you consider the socialist countries to be more capable of adaptation than Western capitalism?

GOLDSTÜCKER: I still believe that in that respect socialism, if it is not a deformed form of socialism, is at any rate theoretically superior to capitalism.

—Yet, because of the existing power situation, people living in socialist societies today will secure neither an improved standard of living, nor assured employment, nor more justice, nor more independence in society from that theoretical model.

GOLDSTÜCKER: That is true. We have now had a socialist world power in existence for more than half a century, and there are now a whole series of other socialist states, and the people in them live in relative poverty, in unfreedom, basically under police régimes, and that is a most terrible incongruity. It will be possible to talk of socialist victory only when it can guarantee people under its sway a greater measure of material and intellectual freedom than any other social system. The deformation of socialism is intelligible only in the light of the backwardness of Russia, where it first triumphed. What happened in Russia was a combination of a progressive social phenomenon and a pre-democratic order. In the Soviet Union we see the foundations of a socialist society, accompanied, however, by an internal order that is pre-industrial, particularly in the relationship between rulers and ruled. Russia has never had a democratic revolution; and the socialist revolution, particularly after Lenin's death, became fossilised at the stage of revolutionary dictatorship.

—The dictatorship remained. What became of the revolution?

GOLDSTÜCKER: The working class that grew up after the civil war was represented by the *muzhiks*, who were more or less illiterate. The political leadership was forced to the conclusion that it could expect no important expression of opinion on the great political questions from the masses, of whom it regarded itself as the plenipotentiary representative. It was thrown back on itself, and regarded itself as capable of judging and deciding everything on its own.

—With no mandate, and no control from below.

GOLDSTÜCKER: The view that the people, to use the Russian expression are *tyomny narod*, "the dark people", still prevails in Russia—not only among the political rulers, but also among the intellectuals, as can be seen from Sakharov's or Amalrik's writings. The Russian people play no role, they never have played a political role, except when they are storming the Winter Palace or dying in a hail of bullets.

—Thus, even in a socialist state, the people is merely an object of politics.

GOLDSTÜCKER: To put it rather pointedly, it can be said that in the socialist Soviet Union the ruled are in the last resort regarded as the private property of the rulers. These are conditions that take us back to age of serfdom.

—In 1948 the situation in Czechoslovakia was very different from that in Russia in 1917. Czechoslovakia had a notable democratic tradition, a strong and conscious proletariat, and was one of the most highly developed industrial countries in Europe. Thus conditions were present for making Czechoslovak socialism into something quite different from the Soviet type—a real democratic, proletarian socialism.

GOLDSTÜCKER: Because of the belief that the Soviet Union was the sole model of socialism (and also under the direct pressure from the Soviet Union), we took over the Soviet system, particularly in the economic sphere, i.e., concentration on heavy industry and over-centralised planning. At the end of the 1950s we saw that we were on the wrong track and were running into a crisis situation. We were building new factories and producing without regard to price or quality. Finally, in 1968, our industrial production (according to official statistics) had nearly sextupled in comparison with 1937; but in spite of that tremendous industrial production we were not able to earn enough to modernise our mechanical equipment. . . .

—Or to satisfy the elementary needs of the population.

GOLDSTÜCKER: During the same period agriculture had hardly grown at all, it was still at the level of 1937. A large part of industrial production had to be squandered in order to subsidise agriculture. And because agriculture could not cope, we had again to spend vast sums buying food from abroad.

—So it was economic predicaments that led to the Party crisis?

GOLDSTÜCKER: The state of the economy was the starting-point. In 1961, when we discovered that our economic development had led, not to growth, but to setback, to chaos, a compromise plan of economic reform was accepted after long discussion. It then became plain that the economic reform could not be successfully carried out if the existing political system was maintained—the centralised, bureaucratic political system that made the carrying out of the economic reform inherently impossible.

—So the old superstructure no longer corresponded with economic necessities?

GOLDSTÜCKER: That is so. At the end of 1967 we were faced with this alternative—either to maintain the political system as it had developed under direct Soviet influence, with centralised personal power in the hands of Novotny and his gang, and look on with open eyes while the country marched to economic catastrophe; or to change the political system in order to make economic reforms possible. That is what happened in 1968.

—But there are examples (for instance, the German Democratic Republic or Hungary) that show that cautious modification of political methods and modernisation of the economy do not necessarily lead to any democratisation of the political system.

GOLDSTÜCKER: In the spring of 1968 a Soviet writer (who visited me in my capacity as president of the Czechoslovak Writers' Congress) gave me exactly the same reply. He pointed out that economic reforms were being successfully carried out in the German Democratic Republic, unaccompanied by any democratisation. The answer is that the technocratisation of the economy can lead to partial successes for a time, but is no solution in the long term. Recently there was news that there were food supply difficulties in some towns in the German Democratic Republic.

—That happens every winter.

GOLDSTÜCKER: As for Hungary—the Hungarians had a bitter lesson, and they know that their economic reform, if it is to be successful, must necessarily have political consequences. But, having learnt by their experiences in 1956 (and ours in 1968), they do not talk about it. They hope that it will remain unnoticed and will not be stopped.

—Do you think that such Hungarian caution would have been out of place in Czechoslovakia in 1968?

GOLDSTÜCKER: In Czechoslovakia caution was no longer possible. The accumulation of dissatisfaction and bitterness among the people was too great. After twenty years of socialism, what was one to think if, for instance, after a trip to the West-German Federal Republic, one crossed the Czechoslovak frontier again and thus came back into a world that was at least fifty years behind the development of the capitalist Germany that had been defeated in the War? The difference had become so striking, we said to ourselves that unless we had a miracle and the West Germans a catastrophe—we should never be able to catch up.

—But were the Russians not ready to tolerate the Czechoslovak reforms up to a point?

GOLDSTÜCKER: Yes, up to a point, because even the men in Moscow knew no way out. On the one hand they cling to the dogma of the absolute leadership of the Party, which means that the Party leadership exercises an absolute monopoly of power in all fields of public life, including the economy. But carrying out economic reforms means giving greater liberty of decision to those working in the economy. And that is what we tried to do. . . .

—In the eyes of the Soviet Union that was a violation of its vital political interests. When those interests ceased to be taken into account, it began to cool off.

GOLDSTÜCKER: None of the Czechoslovak Communists wanted to diminish the leading role of the Party; all they wanted was to give it a form corresponding with concrete conditions. I repeat: the alternative was either to march headlong into an economic crisis under the existing political system or to adapt it to the necessities of economic reform. That is what we did.

TO WHAT EXTENT did the Czechoslovak Central Committee take account of the fact that these reforms would swell into an avalanche that could not be stopped and would escape from all control?

GOLDSTÜCKER: I think that the members of the Central Committee who met on 5 January 1968 were not conscious of all the consequences. What all present felt was that something radical had to be done to rescue our whole society from a profound crisis. As a living organism the Party was withering away. At the meeting of the Central Committee in October 1967 a representative of the local party in Ostrava (that is, the most highly industrialised area of the country), rose and said that an inquiry had shown that 26% of all the Party organisations there had not a single member under the age of twenty-five, and that another 18% had only one member under twenty-five. "That, comrades," he said, "means that our Party is dying out, because it has no more attraction for the young generation, for our future." He was immediately attacked. How, he was asked, could the local leadership have taken the liberty of undertaking such an inquiry without orders from the Politbureau?

—In that case was it right to try to save society with precisely that dying organisation?

Was it sufficient merely to put a new head on a body that was sick unto death?

GOLDSTÜCKER: We did more than that: we tried to reactivate the vital forces of society. To give you merely one example, until January 1968 a Party decision dating from 1948 or 1949 was in force that in the terminology of the Party apparatus was called the "cadre ceiling". . . .

—That's the term used in the Soviet Union.

GOLDSTÜCKER: It meant that certain functions in society, in government and in the economy, could be carried out only by Party members. Never mind whether a man was qualified for a post or not, if he were not a member of the Party he could not be the manager of the factory. Important posts were consequently filled purely because of Party membership and not because of qualifications for the job. We did away with that immediately. The Party's Central Committee took the initiative for the necessary changes, with the result that the authority of the Party increased in the eyes of the overwhelming majority. Between January and August 1968 nothing happened that jeopardised the leading role of the Party or the socialist development of Czechoslovakia.

—The censorship was abolished.

GOLDSTÜCKER: We experienced something new in history. From February to August 1968 we had a degree of freedom of expression of opinion in Czechoslovakia such as hardly existed at the time anywhere else in the world, including the liberal capitalist countries. We had a permanent referendum every day; everyone could express his opinion on all questions absolutely freely, and nobody could stop him. During the whole time no serious proposals were made or opinions expressed that questioned the socialist nature of our society. Nobody suggested that socialist enterprises should be returned to private ownership. When we were accused by the propaganda of our own camp of being "on the way back to capitalism", our workers laughed, and said: "Show us the capitalist to whom we wish to hand back the factories that we have built!" And even more interesting was the fact that no one seriously proposed that collectively-owned agricultural land should be handed back to private ownership—in contrast to Poland, say, in 1956.

—But in the field of foreign affairs the interests of the Soviet Union were threatened when there was talk of Czechoslovak neutrality, of withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact.

GOLDSTÜCKER: Such illusory ideas were put forward only after 21 August.

—At all events, the Czechoslovak Party, with its model of a pluralist socialism, was a challenge to the Soviet system. The Czechoslovak Party wanted to compete with other political groupings in the country in democratic elections. Thus the Communist Party had to face the possibility of being put into an opposition role within a democratic socialist system.

GOLDSTÜCKER: No, no, no. That is wrong. The Communist Party had all power firmly in its hands. It was responsible for the development of society over twenty years. Who else but the Communists would propose new ideas, a new programme?

—Forces outside the Communist Party, perhaps.

GOLDSTÜCKER: We were ready to cooperate with those forces. The Communists were ready to listen to and cooperate with everyone.

—If free elections had been allowed in Czechoslovakia, the majority of the population might perhaps have voted against the Communist Party. . . .

GOLDSTÜCKER: We had, of course, to adapt the electoral system to the concrete situation. We could not from one day to the next go over to completely free elections, that was obvious. On the basis of a freely concluded agreement of all democratic organisations, we should have excluded a struggle for power at this phase of history.

—So in the transitional period there would be no complete popular sovereignty yet, but a little bit of manipulation would still remain?

GOLDSTÜCKER: The transition would have to be carried out very cautiously.

—In some places committees were formed with a view to the foundation of a Social Democratic Party. How could agreements have ensured that the Social Democrats would not have been stronger than the Communists?

GOLDSTÜCKER: I took the view at the time that the setting up of a Social Democratic Party in 1968 would be a harmful step. Twenty years before the Social Democrats ceased to exist as an independent party, and the

majority of its members were absorbed by the Communist Party, and only a small minority remained outside political life. Now, twenty years later, this minority came forward and said: we want to re-establish our party. What could the Social Democratic Party offer now? It could rely on one single thing, namely exploitation of dissatisfaction with the mistakes, failures, and actual crimes of the Communist leadership in the course of the past twenty years. What else could it offer at a time when the Communist Party, which had everything under its control, was putting forward a programme acceptable to the overwhelming majority of the population?

—That could have been left to the electors to decide.

GOLDSTÜCKER: No, in the existing situation we could not have permitted free elections that would have meant a struggle for power. Externally that would have put us in great danger, for the Soviet Union would have regarded an attempt by Social Democratic officials to re-establish their party as endangering the unity of the working class, and rightly so.

—The Social Democrats might possibly have established working-class unity with their party, as they have in Western Germany.

GOLDSTÜCKER: But Social Democrats have nowhere established socialist democracy or democratic socialism for the working class. Even in Sweden, for instance, there is no socialist society.

—The Social Democrats do not want a socialist society.

GOLDSTÜCKER: True. But we believe that the solution of the problem of humanity's future lies in socialism.

—So the Social Democrats should not be allowed to take part in an election because they do not take their stand on a socialist society.

GOLDSTÜCKER: I did not say that. But, looking at the situation objectively, in the conditions prevailing in Czechoslovakia at the time, the revival of a Social Democratic Party offered no positive prospects for the future.

—That is exactly what the Christian Democratic Party in West Germany said after twenty years of Christian Democratic rule.

GOLDSTÜCKER: I beg your pardon?

—They said that the Social Democrats should be prevented from coming into power because they offered no prospects.

GOLDSTÜCKER: I mean socialist prospects. At the stage we were in, that was something we could not do.

—But this example shows that the Prague ideals do not quite harmonise with practice.

GOLDSTÜCKER: I believe that to achieve the transition to socialism the assumption of power by the representatives of the working-class party and the conscious exploitation of power for the transformation of society into a socialist society is essential for achieving the aims of the socialist movement. Social Democracy has denied this central point. It believes there must be no exploitation of power for the reconstruction of society.

—Perhaps because the Social Democrats assess more accurately the temptations of power.

GOLDSTÜCKER: Yes, perhaps, but perhaps also for different reasons. Historically, the situation is that we had had our socialist revolution; we were in a position in which, after the carrying out of the basic socialist revolution, it was possible to achieve the original aims of the socialist movement. What purpose could the Social Democrats serve in such a situation?

—They might have presented an alternative from below.

GOLDSTÜCKER: But why an alternative? What sort of an alternative?

—An alternative to the Communists, who so far have not succeeded in combining socialism with democracy. Also there may have been broad sections of the population that wanted a social but not a socialist state.

GOLDSTÜCKER: No, there was no such thing, the whole development during the months between January and August showed that clearly.

—In that case the Social Democrats would not have been a danger.

GOLDSTÜCKER: They would have remained a small sect.

—Then they could have been tolerated. . . .

GOLDSTÜCKER: No, because at all events they represented an attempt to split the hard-won unity of the working class. There was no need to return to the multi-party system. Our first

task was to democratise the Communist Party. With the new Party constitution that was put forward for public discussion on 10 August 1968 we wanted to introduce the right to existence of a minority that could freely express its opinions at all levels of the Party, could fight to have them accepted, and could still state its views, even if defeated.

—That, of course, would have meant the end of Lenin's democratic centralism.

GOLDSTÜCKER: No, Lenin's democratic centralism merely means that the minority must accept majority decisions and, when they have been made, must help to carry them out. That is the meaning of democratic centralism.

—But the constitution departed from that.

GOLDSTÜCKER: No, it adhered to it. The minority was to be allowed to continue to argue its point of view. Also the constitution introduced what is no doubt a trivial point for you, but was a vital one for us, namely the secret ballot in elections of Party officials at all levels of Party life. This has now been attacked again, on the ground that it conflicts with the Party tradition.

—Reform on those lines might threaten the existence of the fraternal Party in the Soviet Union.

GOLDSTÜCKER: I am convinced of the opposite. If the fraternal Party in the Soviet Union had established a sort of *modus vivendi* with us, developments in Czechoslovakia might have been of use to them, as opening the possibility of their own transition to this second phase of the revolution, which has been pending in the Soviet Union for such a long time. Also they would have had in us the most loyal and devoted allies.

—But that would certainly have jeopardised, if not the Soviet "fraternal Party", then the Novotnys of the Soviet Union.

GOLDSTÜCKER: We wanted to restore the substance to the democratic institutions that exist on paper even in the Soviet Union: to the parliament that is no parliament, to the elections that are no elections. . . .

—And to the soviets, that have long since ceased to be workers' councils?

GOLDSTÜCKER: The soviets—and the trade unions—that no longer represent the interests of the workers.

—In other words, if the Czechoslovak democratic socialist model had worked, it would have demonstrated that fifty years of Soviet development had simply been on the wrong lines?

GOLDSTÜCKER: No, no. If we had had time to carry out what we had begun, it would have certainly led to its being taken over, adapted, in the other socialist countries, including the Soviet Union.

—But that is exactly what caused Moscow to intervene.

GOLDSTÜCKER: But the adaptation is necessary, it is historically necessary, and one way or the other it is bound to come. By suppressing the Czechoslovak experiment they have blocked their own path, repressed their own future. At that time, in 1968, everything could have gone forward very peacefully. . . .

—In the Soviet Union too?

GOLDSTÜCKER: In the Soviet Union too. But the longer it is put off, the smaller are the chances of a peaceful solution. The repressive measures taken by the Soviet régime after the intervention in Czechoslovakia show that the Soviet leadership is aware of it. The longer it is put off, the greater the danger of an explosion; resort has to be had to these repressive measures as a precaution against this.

—But the forces in the Soviet Union that wish to change their society by revolution from above, that is, more or less after the pattern of the Czechoslovak reform, might have been weakened by the development of the Czechoslovak reforms if the existence of the Warsaw Pact or the "leading role of the Party" were even slightly jeopardised thereby.

GOLDSTÜCKER: But the Soviet leadership had the power to control the extent of this adaptation.

—Less than the Czechoslovak Communist Party, because of the unfavourable historical background and other conditions.

GOLDSTÜCKER: The longer a socialist state is ruled undemocratically, the greater is the regression; and this regression is obvious, after all. It just cannot be prevented by appeals to greater discipline, or violent measures, or by relieving some managers of their posts, or changing a few ministers.

—Professor Goldstücker, democracy always assumes politically conscious, responsible citi-

zens. Do you believe the average Soviet kolkhoz peasant or factory worker, whose consciousness has been manipulated for decades, who has been isolated from the outside world and trained only in what the Party has prescribed—do you believe such people to be capable within a few months of becoming responsible citizens in a socialist society?

GOLDSTÜCKER: The argument that the people are unripe for democracy is as old as the hills. It is only by democratic practice that a subject can develop into a democratic citizen. Democracy can be learnt only by practising it. Of course there are risks during the transitional period. But the possibilities of such a transition must be created in the Soviet Union, even though it is a very slow process, requiring a great deal of caution. It is only in that direction that the further development of socialism is possible.

—But wasn't just that caution jeopardised by the events in Czechoslovakia? Didn't it put the forces of reform in the Soviet Union under pressure?

GOLDSTÜCKER: It threatened only those Soviet leaders who in their way of thinking are so deeply committed to the exercise of absolute power that they are incapable of developing new ideas. The longer this situation is maintained without being resolved, the smaller is the chance of a peaceful solution and the greater the danger of an elementary explosion that could be catastrophic—probably to the whole world. . . .

—But Professor Goldstücker, if you as a Communist express such a prognosis in a western journal of "the capitalist world", will you not be accused of treachery?

GOLDSTÜCKER: After mature consideration, I have come to the conclusion that the only revolutionary thing in the world is the truth. If I talk of weaknesses and mistakes and crimes that have been committed in the name of socialism, I am not guilty of those mistakes and crimes, but am merely calling things by their right names. That is the intellectual's duty in relation to society. The mistakes and crimes are the responsibility of those who conceived them and carried them out. It is they who are the real enemies of socialism. The great Russian patriot Gogol, who so greatly loved his country, chose as the motto for his *Inspector*, that exposed its weaknesses, this sentence: "If you have a crooked mouth, don't smash the mirror! . . ."

AUTHORS & CRITICS

Playing Games

Bernean Analysis & Literary Criticism

By Philip Hobsbaum

EVERYONE KNOWS, or ought to know, Dr Eric Berne's lively book on the psychology of human relationships—and had it been called that, and not *Games People Play*,¹ it might have been taken more seriously. But the very lucidity and wit of Dr Berne's exposition allowed the pedants to say "facile" and the laymen to treat it as a joke. Many a serious book is read in jest. The post-war era has seen *Parkinson's Law* and *Gamesmanship*; the latter mapped an important area of human behaviour and was, in a way, a precursor of Dr Berne's study.

There is no doubt that in most of our social activity we are playing games with each other, mildly or dangerously neurotic as the case may be; and to realise this could save us all a good deal of bad temper and expended emotion. Berne's thesis is that most human relationships have a central figure who is trying to obtain reassurance by scoring off the others in the particular game he is playing. Typical games, defined by their titles, include *See What You Made Me Do*, *Let's You and Him Fight*, and *Gee, You're Wonderful*, *Mister Murgatroyd*. Or, to abstract it from Dr Berne's colourful language: the game in which you blame others for that which is your own fault; the game where someone (usually a woman) sets two

men at loggerheads with each other; and the game where you shower admiration upon your professor or doctor or boss as a substitute for doing any thinking for yourself.

Obviously Dr Berne's book has its defects. Some of his games—particularly the more specialised ones like *Pervert*—seem less applicable to the range of human conduct than others. It could be argued, moreover, that some very important games have been left out—*Teddybear*, that game which masks aggressive behaviour in surface charm; *Pussycat*, which consists of an endless retreat into deference; and *Karate*, which simply consists of doing the worst thing you can to your adversary regardless of consequences to either of you. Moreover, Dr Berne restricts too narrowly the possible range of motivation. Work as a driving force—or what lies behind work—comes into his trajectory hardly at all. And this means that some of the most career-orientated games, such as *Sir, May I give your dog my Sunday dinner* and *Old Henry is doing quite well considering he's nearly retiring age*, are left out of consideration. Most central of all, the book has neither the authority of detailed clinical reports nor the psychological depth of good fiction. Dr Berne's aggressors and victims—*Alcoholic*, *Patsy*, *Schlemiel*, *Schlemazl*, *Frigid Man*, *Frigid Woman*—remain psychological types defined only by the games that they play.

There are two ways forward from Berne. One I am certainly not qualified to take—that of the clinical psychiatrist. But we would now like thousands of reports back from the firing line: adequately classified, these could bring a great deal of light to bear on the curious way in which vagaries of emotion overbear human rationality, and the way also in which some of our strongest impulses tend rapidly towards our own destruction.

The other way forward may, at first sight, seem frivolous: it is the way of the literary critic. Dr Berne's experience may be actual, but his book is a book and may be criticised in literary terms. In such terms it has, from time to time, the aspirations of a novel without the ballast a sustained dramatic fiction can give. So that, in analysing human behaviour, Dr Berne has written a vigorous psychological study which is also an imperfect novel. Consider this account of the game called *Frigid Woman*.

As the weeks or months pass, the wife becomes increasingly informal and sometimes forgetful. She walks through the bedroom half dressed or forgets her clean towel when she

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¹ Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (1966).