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## Miloš Forman *on Václav Havel, New York, 2000*

**W**In 1969, when Vašek, after a visit to New York, returned to Czechoslovakia which was now entering the period of restrictive Communist policy known as Normalization (reversing the effects of the unfinished reforms of the Prague Spring), I stopped believing he had any common sense at all. Twenty years later, when he returned to New York as the Czechoslovak President, I stopped calling him 'Vašek' (a diminutive of his name).

On the day Václav arrived in New York, a tremendous celebration in his honour was held in the largest cathedral in the city. As part of the organizations I had approached a variety of celebrities, asking them to come and say a few words. All of them (Plácido Domingo, Paul Newman, Paul Simon, Misha Baryshnikov, Dizzy Gillespie, Susan Sarandon, Spike Lee, Henry Kissinger, Arthur Miller, James Taylor, Tom Hulce, Saul Bellow, Gregory Peck, Barbara Walters, Ellie Wiesel, Christopher Reeve, Joe Papp and several others) agreed to come – except for Harry Belafonte; I think I caught him when he was still half asleep or in a bad mood.

The cathedral was full, the mood was festive, the Czechoslovak émigrés were stirred and the Americans were celebratory. Suddenly I noticed that standing in the background by the stoup was Harry Belafonte. He had come after all, and even said a few words.

The next day President Havel turned into sentimental Vašek. He wanted to walk through New York and see the places where we had once spent hours wandering around together more than twenty years ago, including Washington Square and the Lower East Side.

The head US government bodyguard politely indicated to Václav that he didn't recommend visiting those parts of the city, because he was afraid the President could get caught in a cross-fire.

Václav laughed in amusement: 'Why didn't somebody tell me that the United States was at war?'

The head bodyguard explained to the President that America was involved in a war, a war against drugs, and that drug dealers operate in the part of town we wanted to go to.

'Do I look like a drug dealer?' Václav asked me.

'Yeah, you do', I told him. 'Drug dealers also have gunslingers escort them around.'

Václav smiled at his bodyguards, who didn't understand a word, and we left.

Safe and sound we made it to the largest, dirtiest rock club in New York. The place was packed. Our great big bodyguards stood out like palm trees among shrubs, but nobody paid any attention to them. The bodyguards' only problem was that in the hullabaloo they couldn't communicate with each other, not even through headquarters with their walkie-talkies. They told Václav that they thought it was time for us to leave.

We didn't leave. We stayed till two in the morning.

I don't know what took place between them and the President the next day, but I do know that when Václav and I said goodbye at the airport that day, those tough guys had tears in their eyes and they hugged Václav."

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## Václav Havel *on the 'order of the spirit'*

**W**Every thing that is of vital significance, even if it takes the form of the most dramatic self-questioning and doubt, is distinguished by a certain transcendental quality beyond the boundary of mere attention to the self – namely, towards others, towards society, towards the world. The fact that one looks outward 'from oneself', that one is concerned with things about which one need not be concerned from the perspective of mere survival, that one repeatedly asks a wide range of questions and repeatedly plunges into the hubbub of the world with the intention of making one's voice heard – only then does one become a person, a creator of an 'order of the spirit', a being that is able to work wonders, to recreate the world. To relinquish one's own transcendentalism means, in fact, to relinquish one's human existence and to be content merely with being a member of the animal kingdom."

October 1981

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## Memorial Tribute

honoring the life and work of

**VÁCLAV HAVEL**  
(1936-2011)

Friday, January 6, 2012

Hosted by the

National Endowment for Democracy

in cooperation with the

Embassy of the Czech Republic  
Washington, DC

and the

Václav Havel Library  
Prague, Czech Republic

**W**ho are the 'dissidents', actually? Nothing more and nothing less than people whom fate, chance, the logic of things and the logic of their work and their dispositions have led them to say aloud what others may think but have not dared state. In some sense, then, the 'dissidents' – no matter how unpleasant or, indeed, outright unbearable they find the thought that they should be the spokesmen or the conscience of the nation – nevertheless speak on behalf of those who remain silent. And they risk their necks when others do not dare to or simply cannot; they risk them, there's no way round it, on their behalf.

-Václav Havel, October 15, 1983



**National Endowment  
for Democracy**

*Supporting freedom around the world*



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More so than any intellectual and political leader in the post-communist world, Václav Havel used his position, voice, and moral authority to advance present-day struggles for freedom.

He lived to see Charter 77, which celebrates its 35th anniversary on this day, transcend its time and place to inform and inspire dissidents following in his footsteps

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## Václav Havel *in his own words*

I have never been a politician, a professional revolutionary or a professional 'dissident'; nor do I have any ambition to become one. I am a writer; I write what I want to write and not what others want me to write, and if I get involved with something other than my literary work, I do so simply because I feel it is my natural, human and civil duty, a duty stemming ultimately from my position as a writer, that is to say, as somebody who is publicly known, who is obliged by this fame to be more vocal about some things than people are who are not well known: not because one is more important or intelligent than they are, but simply because – whether one likes it or not – one is in a different situation, one which requires a different kind of responsibility. Although I have, of course, clear-cut views on many things, I do not adhere to any concrete ideology, doctrine or even political party or sect; I am in the service of no one, let alone any power; if I serve anything, then it is my conscience. I'm neither a Communist

nor an anti-Communist, and if I criticize my government, it is not because it is Communist but because it is bad."

April 1983

I prefer 'anti-political politics', that is to say, politics not as the technology of power and its manipulation or as the cybernetic control of people or the art of pragmatism, machinations and intrigues, but of politics as a way of searching for meaning in life and attaining it, as a way of protecting that meaning and serving it; politics as applied morals; as serving the truth; as an essentially human concern – governed by human criteria – for one's neighbours. In today's world it is probably an extremely impractical way, one very difficult to apply in everyday life. Nonetheless I know of no better alternative."

February 1984

"...the politician – and, in fact, every member of the political élite – is not only a

around the world. His death is deeply mourned by all who love democracy, but his work and legacy continue to breathe wherever people yearn to be free.

We gather to hear reflections from many who knew and worked with Václav Havel to advance this ideal – as well as from dissidents past and present – who have benefitted from his solidarity.

'function' of society; society is, vice versa, always also a 'function' of its politicians and élites. Élites exert an influence on their society and mobilize the forces that can be mobilized: a feckless politician brings out the fecklessness in society; the brave politician, by contrast, mobilizes bravery. Our nations [Czech and Slovak] are capable both of cowardly behaviour and of brave actions, of exhibiting almost religious zeal and of being led by selfish indifference; Czechs and Slovaks are capable of heroic fighting and also insidious denunciation. Which of those two qualities actually predominates in society and in each member of society at any one time depends to a large extent on what situation the political élite has created at that moment, what alternatives he or she presents people with, which qualities provide (or do not provide) an opportunity to apply oneself and to develop, and what, simply, the elite by their work and own example arouse in people."

August 1969

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## Václav Havel *on signing Charter 77*

The day the [Charter 77] signatures were to be delivered to my place, I was rather nervous. There were indications that the police already knew something (and it would have been surprising if they hadn't), and I was afraid they would break into my place just when everything had been assembled and we would lose all our signatures. I got even more nervous because, although the meeting was supposed to be at four o'clock, it was almost five and there was still no sign of Zdenek Mlynár, who was bringing in signatures gathered in ex-communist circles. It turned out there had been a simple misunderstanding about the time, and he eventually arrived, with more than a hundred signatures, which took my breath away. The final tally for the first round was 243 signatures. The police did not show up, we got all the business out of the way, and then a small circle of us drank a toast with champagne."



It was an exciting time, what with attacks by the police, escaping from shadows, crawling through the woods, hiding out in the flats of coconspirators, house searches, and dramatic moments when important documents were eaten. It was also at this time that we had meetings with the Polish dissidents on our common border [above; the notorious anti-hiker Havel was compelled to walk to the summit of Sněžka five times, but there was a reward: he was able to meet and establish permanent friendships with Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuron, and other members of KOR, the Workers' Defense Committee]."

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## Charter 77 *Excerpts*

Charter 77 is a free, informal and open community of people of different convictions and faiths, and belonging to different professions, who are united by the will to strive, individually and collectively, to achieve respect for civil and human rights in our own country and throughout the world – rights asserted for all humanity by the two mentioned international covenants, by the Final Document of the Helsinki conference and by numerous other international documents opposing war, violence and social or spiritual oppression, and articulated comprehensively in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations.

Charter 77 springs from the friendship and solidarity which has developed among those who share a common concern for the fate of the ideals which have inspired their lives and their work.

Charter 77 is not an organisation; it has no rules, permanent bodies or formal membership. It embraces everyone who agrees with its ideas, participates in its work and lends it support. It does not form the basis for any oppositional political activity.

Like many similar citizens' campaigns in different countries, West and East, it seeks to promote the general public interest. It does not aim, therefore, to set out its own programmes for political or social reforms or changes...

As its symbolic name indicates, Charter 77 has come into existence at the opening of a year proclaimed as the Year of Political Prisoners – a year in which a conference in Belgrade is due to review the implementation of the obligations assumed at Helsinki.

As signatories, we hereby authorise Professor Jan Patočka, Vaclav Havel and Professor Jiri Hajek to act as spokesmen for the Charter....

We firmly believe that Charter 77 will help bring about a situation in which all the citizens of Czechoslovakia will be able to work and live as free human beings.

Prague, 1st January 1977 (241 signatories)