

After the Wall Came Down

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1. Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., In Search of Civil Society: Independent Peace Movements in the Soviet Bloc, 1990. Routledge, x + 193193 pp.
2. Charles Gati, The Bloc that Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition, 1990. Indiana University Press, xiv + 226 pp.
3. Ralf Dahrendork, Reflections on the Revolution in Europe In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Warsaw, 1990. Random House, 163 pp.
4. Adam Zagajewski, Solidarity, Solitude, 1990. Ecco Press, 176 pp.
5. H. Gordon Skilling, Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe, 1989. Ohio State University Press, xi + 293 pp.
6. Timothy Garton Ash, Uses of Adversity, 1989. Vintage Press, xi + 335 pp.
7. Timothy Garton Ash, The Magic Lantern, 1990. Vintage Press, 156 pp.
8. B. Gwertzman and M.T. Kaufman, eds., The Collapse of Communism, 1990. Times Books, xi + 353 pp.

The stunning metamorphosis of the former communist countries during 1989 keep haunting us. As Ronald Linden of Radio Free Europe expressed, "Our jaws cannot drop any lower." The changes were so astonishing that most East Europeanists are still experiencing a sense of "political shock" and awe. In part this may explain the slowness of scholarly articles on this matter, aside from the newspaper and talk-show-host style reportage. As an anthropologist friend sarcastically remarked: "I need to go over and see the results with my own eyes to believe it." True as it may be, anthropologists have not been in the forefront in observing these events and the glory of reporting from the field went to historians, political scientists and others who were more flexible to jump on the rolling wheel of history. Our fieldwork and participant observation techniques, while quite unique and justified for many reasons, proved inadequate to deal with the stormy changes that swept through Eastern Europe.

As time goes by, however, more and more scholarly studies reach the market and we can read answers to questions which we are the most interested: what led to these momentous changes? how could it all happen so suddenly? or why did the Soviet system collapse in Eastern

Europe? While most books mentioned in this review try to answer these, I hope to show that the answers provided are not always in agreement or even feasible. Yet, they are helpful in understanding some aspects of the transformation in Eastern Europe.

Vladimir Tismaneanu's edited volume, *In Search of Civil Society: Independent Peace Movements in the Soviet Bloc* (New York: Routledge, 1990), is an impressive collection of articles dealing with the emergence of nonstate, unofficial grass-roots peace movements. Focusing on the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the former East Germany, this addendum to the growing scholarly literature on the now defunct Soviet Bloc is a milestone that will remain on reading lists for many years to come. The articles-- two of which are written by the Hungarian and Russian dissident activists, M. Haraszti and E. Kuznetsov--all detail independent peace activism in national contexts while at the same time they point to the emergence of civil society before the 1989-1990 revolutions.

For example, in Haraszti's contribution we learn that students already formed an oppositional peace movement as early as 1980 eventually leading to growing criticism and antistate sentiments. The Trust, Friendship and Dialogue groups, all emerged in the mid-1980s, during the years of Andropov-Chernenko uncertainties, signaled changes in the Soviet Union, and it is not their fault that success was not comparable to those in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. Milan Hauner's article on Czechoslovakia considers a much broader framework in which the Charter 77 and the rock counterculture of the early 1980s formed a unified anti-government oppositional agenda leading to the collapse of the Husak regime. Lazarski, while discussing the nature of the Polish opposition and its peace activism, makes a revealing point when he admits that the difference between Western and Eastern European peace movements was that in Eastern Europe the issue of peace was interconnected to that of liberty (p. 122). This explains why for example many peace groups-- initially under the spell of Western European peace movements-- lost their momentum once the regimes were delegitimized. This is indeed one of my reservations about the volume's positive tone concerning the political longevity of these movements.

While it is true that most of the articles end with 1988, before the collapse of the state socialist systems (only Hauner's article has a short conclusion explaining the beginning of the 1989 events in Czechoslovakia), the actual revolutions of 1989 and 1990 can be explained only in part with the emergence of these independent peace movements. Many of the activists,

however adamant and organized before, could not survive the 1989-1990 upheavals. Most of them tried to reorganize hastily during the feverish months of late 1989 and early 1990, but very few of them were successful to mount a political campaign during the elections. Some, like the former Hungarian Danube Circle members and the East German Initiative for Peace and Human Rights, appeared on the political stage as legitimate Green parties with no success. The question of their demise as well as the lack of such movements in other former Soviet Bloc countries (namely Romania and Bulgaria) left me wishing for more. However, I cannot but congratulate Tismaneanu for his fine volume in gathering together important information on the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, a topic that is also dealt with in Charles Gati's *The Bloc that Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

Like so many other studies on Eastern Europe, Gati's study too had to be rewritten during 1989 to include some of the dramatic changes taking place. Unlike the detailed chapters in Tismaneanu's book, Gati deals with the domestic and international problems of the Soviet Union and its East European allies on a global, more abstract level. In fact, Gati's book is full with broad theoretical insights, propositions and forecasting one rarely finds in more humanistic oriented anthropology or sociology. While this kind of political science and applied "guesswork" may turn off some of us, I have nevertheless learned much from reading Gati's sweeping historical generalizations about Stalinism, the time of Khrushchev and Brezhnev and the years following them.

However, at times I wished for more detailed analysis and presentation of data-- meticulous and specific as Gati's book-- and I kept asking myself how would this book serve students whose knowledge in this area is minimal. Gati's main question (why did the 1988-89 revolutions occur?) has a simple (almost too simple) answer: because the Soviet bloc created its own inherent contradictions since the very beginning. To the question why now? Gati's answer is also elementary: because of the 1988-89 domestic crisis within the Soviet Union that allowed no military intervention in the affairs of its East European satellites. I think social scientists will be able to utilize Gati's book for many years to come not because of its detailed analytical explanations but because it provides larger questions and models within which one can approach smaller projects and particular local studies.

Similar in scope and treatment is the book by Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Warsaw* (New

York: Random House, 1990). A former director of the London School of Economics and member of the West German parliament, Dahrendorf's book is one long polemical essay, written in a humane and passionate way. He sees 1989 as the year of "tears of joy," a true *annus mirabilis*. His insights are worthy of attention by social scientists studying Europe at this historical juncture. Arguing against Hayek's constitutionalist model and Fukuyama's overrated essay on the "end of history" for Eastern Europeans on their path to become free-market capitalist societies, Dahrendorf makes a convincing case when he argues that the countries of East Central Europe have not shed their Communist system in order to embrace the capitalist system (whatever that is); they have shed a closed system in order to create an open society, the open society to be exact, for while there can be many systems, there is only one open society (pp. 40-41).

And we might extend Dahrendorf's point, as well as those writers' in the Tismaneanu collection, that this is also the notion of civil society per se. I guess this book is refreshing because it explains some of the Western understanding about the East European revolutions and their consequences for the Europe of 1992 and beyond. He raises fascinating, and often disturbing, questions such as the re-introduced political discourse on *Mitteleuropa* currently in vogue from Warsaw to Budapest, from Bucharest to Ljubljana; the difficult road to capitalism and the penetration of capital into East Central European markets; the dangers lurking behind the concepts of "social democracy" applauded by many current parliaments and parties in the former Soviet satellites; and the necessity for political and economic reforms to go hand- in-hand if the emerging democracies want to maintain a broad mass support. As Dahrendorf says, "Man certainly does not live by bread alone, but neither does he, or she, live by *glasnost* and *perestroika*, or even democracy, alone (p. 82). He criticizes orthodox explanations for the material and economic primacy in maintaining stability and order and sounds a warning to take "freedom" seriously and the rush to build "civil society" overnight.

Dahrendorf also makes a point about the seeming ironic twist of fate that followed many East European populist leaders and parties. He stresses, rightly in my mind, that while Michnik and Walesa in Poland, Havel in Czechoslovakia, Kis, Demszky and Orbán in Hungary, all saw the development of civil society as giving autonomy and power to independent institutions and organizations outside the state sphere, in fact against the state, now many of these formerly "independent" centers are themselves embodying the state and the ruling power-base.

Finally, I found Dahrendorf's treatment of the new Europe and Germany's role in it fascinating and original. His fatherly words to the "wayward children of Eastern Europe" (Havel's phrase not mine!) should become mottos for those wishing to run into the arms of the West and cast everything aside to become more European than anybody else. The "defection to the West," to use his expression, should not result in a reified hegemonic ideology of Europe disregarding the political, economic, geographic and cultural connotations of what European diversity is all about. The reintegration of small states into modern European standards will take many years, perhaps generations, and even then it will be only a state of mind for most. To close this review of Dahrendorf's book, let me just paraphrase him once more: Watching Swedish pornographic movies on a Japanese VCR is no substitute for living in a civil society. Unlike *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, the collection of essays by the Polish writer and poet Adam Zagajewski, *Solidarity, Solitude* (New York: Ecco Press, 1990), is a marvellous look at how an emigre intellectual views himself, Poland and Eastern Europe. Almost an antithesis of Dahrendorf's outsiders' perspective, Zagajewski allows his emotions and literary persona to take over to explain the events he feels are important. He is not one of the gloomy, disinherited Eastern European emigre writers following the tradition of Kundera, Konrad, Danilo Kis and Solzhenitsin. On the contrary, after emigrating to Paris, in 1982, Zagajewski realized his Polishness and his voice more than ever before. He argues with Kundera and tries to explain Central Europeanness and Polishness with a different feeling for culture and tradition. More than that, Zagajewski, in a brilliant essay entitled "The High Wall," argues that the notion what Central Europe really is, is not so much the result of German influence on cultural traditions east of the Elbe, but also the result of Sovietization.

This process also helped to create a different sense of history. For Zagajewski, East Europeans may have been deprived of certain sense of their history through Sovietization but this also created a specific sense of "historical tension" not present anywhere else in Europe. This dialectical tension between what goes on locally and internationally, at the present and before, with the narrator and without the narrator, is best expressed perhaps with a quote from Kafka's diary note written on August 2, 1914: "The Germans declared war on Russia. This afternoon, swimming lessons" (p. 52). I cannot do real justice to Zagajewski's poetic voice and clarity in treating topics as diverse as Polish suffering, martial law, *Solidarity*, artists under censorship, literary analyses and reflections on arts ranging from Yeats to Fellini, from Thomas Mann to

Carlos Saura. I believe his is one of those rare books that reveal so much without being wordy and egocentric. His book deserves to be read by those who are intrigued by the minds of European intellectuals and who want to understand cultures from the point of view of the bricolour. The next book under consideration, H. Gordon Skilling's *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), is also special in many ways for it treats its specific subject matter with ease and clarity. Skilling, a political scientist who wrote much about Czechoslovakia, examines the many forms of samizdat as a form of dissent in Eastern Europe. He furnishes a wealth of material assessing the validity of the concepts "independent" and "parallel" society used widely since the early 1980s. His treatment of the Charter 77 and other forms of autonomous actions is systematic and useful especially for those who only want to explain the revolutions of 1989 in more immediate terms.

Skilling makes a convincing case for the emergence of various cultural forms of samizdat, ranging from China, Hungary, Russia and Poland, as an independent anti-state political activity expressing voices of dissent and opposition. Obviously, samizdat (an acronym of Russian "samsebyaizdat" i.e., "publishing house for oneself") is not a new phenomenon, as Skilling tells us. On December 22, 1848, Dostoyevsky was sentenced to death for distributing a letter criticizing the conditions in tsarist Russia. Since that time, artists, dissidents and writers were always a threat to the state because of the power of their pen. The chapters by Skilling, many of which are articles and lectures from the early 1980s republished here, deal with various samizdat traditions in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Rumania (sic). Skilling's point is that without these grass-roots movements independent, civil society could not have emerged. It was through these adamant voices that non-state organizations, unofficial writers' circles, study groups, human rights action committees made their appearances on the national as well as the international scene.

What is also important, Skilling tells us, is that from the early 1980s on, these outspoken critics of the state socialist system, often facing harsh police treatment, jail sentences and abrogation of basic human and civil rights, became organized across national boundaries leading to the founding of Information Network for Dialogue between East and West, the WIP seminars in Warsaw, peace activism and several perestroika and glasnost clubs. Although Skilling's study closes with the events of the early 1988, his model-- that the creation of independent and alternative society (originally the proposition of the Hungarian sociologist E. Hankiss)-- helped

start the revolutionary movements from below leading to an eventual delegitimation of the regimes, was proved by the events taking place in 1989.

Most people reading this book will find many gems. For one, there is a wealth of original sources gathered here that will save much time and energy for searching for facts, dates, and names. It is also one of those books that brings back memories and recreates the last years of East European regimes; it will remind many readers how far the societies discussed have come and, in many cases, how far they will have to travel in their quest for a "civil society."

The last few books do not need any special recommendations for they speak for themselves. I just want to name them and mention them in passing. The name of Timothy Garton Ash needs no advertisement. His articles documenting the changes in East-Central Europe since the early 1980s, on the pages of the Spectator, the Times Literary Supplement, The New York Review of Books, have given us much delight and food for thought. Now we can find these in two collected volumes: *The Uses of Adversity* (1989) and *The Magic Lantern* (1990, both by Vintage Books). While the former deals with the independent non-state dissident activities up to 1989, the latter describes "the events" of that year. His analyses of the early underground attempts to reform the system are revealing not so much for their analytical details but for their historical value. His powerless culture heroes of Michnik, Walesa and Havel are now powerful statesmen. The leitmotif of both books is that non-violent popular pressure in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary was successful in overthrowing their respective governments. While one could question some of Ash's conclusions and over-reliance on dissident intellectuals' statements and philosophy, in general I think that his essays provide an educated synopsis of what happened during the 1980s in those three countries.

Let me close by recommending another collection of short but informative articles edited by B. Gwertzman and M.T.Kaufman, *The Collapse of Communism* (New York: Times Books, 1990). Here is a useful volume by the correspondents of The New York Times who had the benefit of being first-hand observers of the events in Eastern Europe, the U.S.S.R., and China. One should not, however, expect to read detailed analysis of every aspect of the 1989 Springtime of the People; rather, I can recommend this volume as an extensive collage of journalistic articles, especially for lower-level courses on Europe and Eastern Europe.

All in all, the above mentioned works are useful in many ways, but most significantly they are important for they start us thinking and questioning about social and political change in

Eastern Europe. Scholarly anthropological studies are yet to be published and I am hopeful that we will be able to make a dent in the growing body of literature on this subject.