and may encourage others to combine analytic thought with warm concern for the folk of the present and past.


Reviewed by Regina Bendix.

C. Banc is a Romanian refugee who in her mental luggage brought a collection of three hundred political jokes to the United States. Alan Dundes teamed up with Ms. Banc to produce the present, thoroughly annotated text collection. The jokes are - admittedly - arbitrarily divided into ten thematic chapters, covering areas such as "The Ministry of Truth" or "Our Beloved Leaders." It is the texts that are of interest to the authors who limit themselves to cursory analytical statements in their preface. Though this is undoubtedly the largest Romanian political joke collection in print, it does fall into the same category as many of the articles and books listed in the bibliography: the texts are taken as testimonials to the terrible living conditions behind the Iron Curtain, and each thematic group is to illustrate yet another facet of grim Communist suppression.

Annotation is the first useful step in the analysis of these jokes. With it, the authors convincingly demonstrate that the same jokes circulate in most Iron Curtain countries, thus illustrating the similarity of sociopolitical experience. Yet the circumstances leading to joke collections like this one make it almost impossible to analyze the material in depth. The jokes here are remembered and told in a drastically different context. Performance character-
istics and biographical information on tellers have to be omitted as they might compromise individuals in their Communist home countries. Thus what remains is annotation and content analysis. The publications on this type of humor uniformly decry Communist oppression - implicitly indicating that "we don't realize how good we've got it ourselves." Though this message may be well taken, it would seem appropriate to now try to take the analysis further: what kind of humor is at work here, and what kind of people generate this type of humor? Did such jokes only emerge under Communist rule, or are there precedents? Such questions, after all, should be of interest to an author otherwise concerned with national character studies, and for some jokes, the authors do supply pre-Revolutionary parallels.

No one seems to be taking up the challenge to do comparative work on Soviet and American humor, even in this era of summits. This book points out - as do many others - that in the United States, one finds comparatively few political jokes. "The more repressive the ideology and system, the more ingenious and clever the political wit," the authors state (p.14). As long as there is no comparative analysis proving otherwise, one must conclude from this that the United States show a dismal lack of political wit (which at this point I wouldn't contest...) and instead a bizarre fascination with sex, handicaps, and disasters, as is evident in joke cycles on Ethiopia, AIDS, and the Challenger catastrophe. It is time to go beyond pitying the clandestine jokesters in a totalitarian regime, and to show some admiration for the humanitarian philosophy reached by those who have to endure it.