

East European Studies at a Crossroads

by Vojtech Mastny

LAWRENCE L. WHETTEN. *Current Research in Comparative Communism: An Analysis and Bibliographic Guide to the Soviet System*. New York, NY, Praeger, 1976.

JAN F. TRISKA and PAUL M. COCKS, Eds. *Political Development in Eastern Europe*. New York, NY, Praeger, 1977.

JANE P. SHAPIRO and PETER J. POTICHNYJ, Eds. *Change and Adaptation in Soviet and East European Politics*. New York, NY, Praeger, 1976.

ANDREW C. JANOS, Ed. *Authoritarian Politics in Communist Europe: Uniformity and Diversity in One-Party States*. Berkeley, CA, Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1976.

MARTIN McCAULEY, Ed. *Communist Power in Europe, 1944-1949*. New York, NY, Barnes and Noble, 1977.

ROBERT R. KING and JAMES F. BROWN, Eds. *Eastern Europe's Uncertain Future: A Selection of Radio Free Europe Research Reports*. New York, NY, Praeger, 1977.

SINCE THE ADVENT of Western scholarship on Eastern Europe, trends in analyzing the region have mirrored closely prevalent conditions there at particular times. So

long as ethnic rivalries set the tone, "nationalism" was the magic word invoked to comprehend the baffling dynamism of East European societies and politics. Then, the imposition of Stalinism inaugurated the vogue of the "totalitarian model," which was a fitting device to grasp those appalling simplicities that distinguished this extraordinary system. The subsequent rise of more ordinary, civilized, and diversified patterns of political behavior rendered equally appropriate the use of conceptual tools developed for the analysis of more "normal" polities.

Initially, the notion of modernization offered an especially healthy corrective to the rigidity of the totalitarian paradigm with its misleading preconceptions about absolute power. More recently, however, the modernization model has seemed destined to go the way of its predecessors—but with no substitutes in sight. The model's implicit assumption of growing convergence between Communist and non-Communist systems no longer holds much water, if it ever did. Both political liberalization and rapid economic growth—two hallmarks of the otherwise disturbingly vague modernization model—may have run their course in Eastern Europe. And a propensity to reduce the vital specifics of communism to the lifeless generics of "socio-political development" has led to

bizarre, oversimplified conclusions.

We have been told that "Communist phenomena are not distinguished from non-Communist ones by any particular characteristics."¹ To be sure, a school may not be distinguished from a prison by any particular characteristics either; still, the future of education would be rather bleak if one were guided by this sort of judgment. Is the future of East European studies similarly bleak—a prospect perhaps again reflecting the condition of the region itself? Has a critical crossroads been reached in both region and scholarship? A look at a representative selection of six recent books should enable us to tell.

OF THE SIX VOLUMES listed above, the first two strive, albeit in different ways, to take stock of the present state of scholarship on comparative communism. Lawrence Whetten surveys in sweeping fashion the state of communism as well, outlining yet another research design based on the assumption that "socialism is fundamentally progressive or change-prone" (p. 3). It is one of those all-inclusive designs concerned with so many different topics that its thrust remains far from clear, despite many a penetrating observation

1. John Kautsky, quoted in Triska-Cocks, p. 4.

along the way. The appended bibliographic guide is truly a bibliographer's nightmare. It is chaotic and error-ridden, and glaring omissions go unexplained. All these are, alas, deficiencies symptomatic of much of the precipitously rising output in the East European field.

Fortunately, as the collection of articles edited by Jan Triska and Paul Cocks proves, they are not the standard fare. In his thoughtful introductory essay to *Political Development in Eastern Europe*, Andrzej Korbonski makes no apologies for the recent rapid growth of the East European "sub-discipline." But neither does he leave any doubt that its accomplishments still fall notably short of the standards attained in Soviet studies. He blames the once prevalent misconception that the resemblance of the Moscow-imposed systems of Eastern Europe to the Soviet model makes their examination redundant. Although that fallacy has been discarded, the progress of scholarship has indeed been uneven.

Among topics of prime importance, the triumphant reassertion of nationalism has, surprisingly, failed to elicit the scholarly interest it deserves—a subconscious reaction perhaps to earlier generations' excessive preoccupation with the phenomenon. Moreover, despite the region's endemic authoritarianism, adequate political biographies of its individual protagonists, including such colorful characters as Janos Kadar of Hungary and Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania, are lacking. While this neglect may be suggestive of too many political scientists' infatuation with abstract models and behavioral patterns, neither has the study of structures and institutions—a prime topic for scholars with a comparative bent—advanced as far as it should. Finally,

despite much excellent research on the economies of Eastern Europe, the amassed quantitative data still await commensurate conclusions in terms of political economy.

In trying to remedy some of these shortcomings, Triska and Cocks have produced a worthy sequel to *The Politics of Modernization in Eastern Europe* edited by Charles Gati.² The wider range of the contributions to the later volume indicates how much the avenues of inquiry shifted within the brief span of three years. As Paul Johnson puts it in his contribution to the Triska-Cocks volume, "we cannot explain political change in post-Stalin East Europe by invoking 'the theory of modernization' or 'the theory of political development'" (p. 37). It is rather description and explanation of politics that matter; instead of more research designs, we need more empirical analysis making good use of the many excellent designs already at hand.

While the diverse conclusions that emerge from the contributions to this volume are difficult to sum up, at least some merit specific mention. One is the finding that the East European regimes have so far responded to the "technological revolution" by mere organizational and administrative adaptation to promote efficiency, but have eschewed fundamental change (Paul Cocks, Kenneth Jowitt). However, it is not so much this response as their failure to forge viable institutional links between rulers and ruled that has continued to be the Achilles' heel of those regimes, as the 1970 events in Poland most vividly demonstrated (Zvi Gitelman). The public's political participation remains rudimentary, though it is not entirely meaningless (Triska), not even in such a

citadel of authoritarianism as Ceausescu's Romania (Mary Ellen Fisher). As exemplified by the most pluralistic of the systems, that of Yugoslavia, substantive expansion of such participation to assure continuity of power is as imperative as it is risky (Lenard Cohen).

Most scholars, though not necessarily the public at large, now accept the proposition that the policies of the East European states are determined overwhelmingly by domestic exigencies, Moscow's persisting supremacy notwithstanding. But the ensuing pluralism need not hamper Soviet control and may in fact serve to enhance it by providing new openings for interference—either by supporting competing internal factions or by manipulating factional coalitions across national boundaries (Kent Brown). Still, the limits of Russian tolerance have been flexible rather than rigid, and non-Soviet influences also have been ascendant in countless ways, abetted by the particular political cultures of the individual countries (Sarah Terry).

Significantly, the record has been one of underestimated Western opportunities and overestimated Soviet determination. According to Gati, more vigorous Western diplomatic engagement and ideological confrontation should supplement the innocuous building of economic ties and promotion of cultural "Westernization," both of which even the most oppressive regimes of the area have proved quite capable of containing. Given the West's recent economic disarray, the closer economic ties tend to increase the East Europeans' dependence on Soviet aid. They also reduce the degree to which the region represents an economic liability to the Russians (Paul Marer). Only Yugoslavia, that perennial maverick,

2. New York, NY, Praeger, 1974.

seems to have managed to weather the impact of Western recession without sacrificing either its extensive Western connections or its liberal economic practices, particularly that of fostering labor migration to Western Europe (William Zimmerman).

NOT ALL THE ARTICLES in the Triska-Cocks volume are easy to read, but the translation from the esoteric dialect of social science into normal English that is sometimes necessary is almost always rewarding. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the set of papers from the 1974 International Slavic Conference (Banff, Alberta, Canada) edited by Jane Shapiro and Peter Potichnyj. The exceptions are three articles concerned with the analysis of values: Joseph Held on the revival of old class attitudes in Communist Hungary, Alexander Matejko on the residue of "feudal" ethics in today's battered Polish society, and Galia Golan on Czechoslovakia's incipient revolution of 1968. But in reading the rest, one cannot help being reminded of Korbonski's lament in his essay already cited about "superficially elaborate frameworks and schemes [that] . . . produce trivial and inconsequential results" (pp. 22-23). Such are the pitfalls of mammoth conferences, which often sacrifice quality to quantity—a shortcoming which even competent editors can only mitigate, not cure.

In contrast, the fruits of the colloquium on *Authoritarian Politics in Communist Europe* organized by Andrew Janos at Berkeley in 1973 prove the virtues of small professional gatherings devoted to a single topic. In dissecting the varieties of Communist authoritarianism, the participants shared the sentiment that "Communist political systems should not

be treated as *sui generis*, but should rather be approached in terms of the general categories of social science" (p. v). This much said, they proceeded with a sharp eye for the all-important specifics of the phenomenon. The editor's own essay, lucid and erudite, sets the tone by applying his innovative matrix to four basic stages of development: revolutionary-millennarian, revolutionary-managerial, bureaucratic-millennarian, bureaucratic-managerial. At the last stage, the deftly depoliticized East German system, taken apart at the expert hands of Melvin Croan, surely deserves a place of distinction for its wholesale cooptation of potential dissenters in the name of efficiency and "progress." Nevertheless, in Croan's opinion "the GDR's experience appears to be unique and not susceptible to being replicated elsewhere" (p. 172) — perhaps a dispiriting conclusion in terms of the conferees' hopes "to develop a potential for comparisons and for explanations by analogy" (p. v).

The symposium yielded no overriding conclusions other than the cautious consensus that the growth within the Communist polities of "private spheres" immune from the regimes' interference does not amount to a significant step toward legitimized political diversity. Even so, the contributions—the others are by Zygmunt Bauman, Thomas Baylis, J.F. Brown, T.H. Rigby, and Paul Shoup—are models of meticulous analysis of the Communist regimes' troubled liaison with the essentially non-Communist societies under their rule.

IN THEIR OWN WAYS, all four books discussed so far highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the social science approach, which is sometimes juxtaposed to the

presumably less scientific "historicism." Historicism has been defined by one of its critics as a proclivity to produce studies that are "non-cumulative, non-comparable, and [prone] to explain change in terms of voluntary responses to events."³ But quite apart from the ill-becoming methodological exclusiveness of such utterances, there is something make-believe about a criticism that political scientists customarily level at each other's work; for the studies in question seldom bear the distinguishing marks of what historians recognize as the tools of their trade. Admittedly, the application of those tools to the analysis of recent events has been slack; even so, its best results are indispensable to complement the best of the social science variety. Certainly the two approaches are in no way incompatible.

Martin McCauley's distinguished series of essays, *Communist Power in Europe, 1944-1949*, provides a good case in point. In preparing the University of London symposium which sponsored the essays, the organizers invited participants to examine Communist policies during the early years of the cold war to see if conclusions were possible regarding Eurocommunist advances toward power in our own time. Proceeding country by country, the authors indeed used "non-cumulative and non-comparable" data quite freely, explaining policies "in terms of voluntary responses to events," namely, in terms of policy choices. They nevertheless arrived at conclusions of considerable weight.

Several of the essays document the far from negligible scope in which the Communists' drive to power after World War II was pre-conditioned, if not encouraged, by

3. David Finley, quoted in Triska-Cocks, p. 366.

the attitudes and actions of their international and domestic adversaries. Ignorance and aloofness on the part of Britain and the United States made a difference in both 1945 Romania (Bela Vago) and 1946 Hungary (George Schöpflin), as did the clumsiness and timidity of non-Communist politicians in 1948 Czechoslovakia (Vladimir Kusin). Conversely, at least two countries where the local Communists and their Soviet patrons either failed or did not even try to seize power—Greece (Richard Clogg) and Finland (Anthony Upton)—offer instructive examples both of Western resolve and of tactical skill exercised by the Communists' domestic competitors. Other factors certainly entered the picture, too, but those singled out here lend good support to Gati's thesis about underestimated Western opportunities and overestimated Soviet determination in Eastern Europe.

After the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, estimates of Soviet determination again ran high, particularly against the contemporary perception of a less than determined United States in Vietnam. The Kremlin's surgical strike in Eastern Europe impressed even critics as an effective way to secure stability for many years to come. One can trace an underlying respect for the feat—along with skepticism about the prospects for change—in nearly all the writings reviewed here.

The notable exception is the most recent book of the lot, a selection of Radio Free Europe (RFE) research reports. Drawing on the superb documentation for which the Munich institution is justly famous, the reports edited by Robert King and J.F. Brown exude that special air of authenticity which comes from constant and intimate contact with primary

sources. The authors maintain that Eastern Europe reached a watershed in the mid-1970's, as the cumulative effect of two new developments transformed the scene. First, the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act (1975) unexpectedly prompted a resurgence of dissent. Second, the repercussions of worldwide economic disturbances at last made their impact, as the skyrocketing costs of raw materials and energy brought the modest prosperity the region enjoyed for a number of years to a halt. In Poland, the two developments merged to trigger cataclysmic price riots which compelled a divided and uncertain leadership to bow before the force of popular will. Elsewhere, too, according to the RFE analysts, the unwillingness—or inability—of aging leaderships to tackle decisively the mounting problems of East European societies presages dislocation rather than stability.

The Radio Free Europe authors appropriately devote a great deal of attention to the increasingly diversified foreign policies of the East European states—potentially the most consequential of the neglected topics of inquiry. There has been an unmistakable tendency in the region to define and pursue separate national interests, which do not always coincide with Soviet preferences even though they need not necessarily collide with Soviet desires either. Does this trend herald a return to the old perils of "Balkanization"? Or is it a harbinger of a more stable, as well as more pluralistic, international order in the area? At the present stage of research, we are unable to tell.

WHAT NEW DIRECTIONS does Eastern Europe's uncertain future demand from scholarship? Certainly the magnitude and multitude of the problems warrant an appo-

site effort to confront them. More than a decade ago, Robert C. Tucker called for "methodological pluralism"⁴ as the most germane approach to the notoriously heterogeneous East European area. His call has never been more topical. But to answer it, the further proliferation of mere articles, no matter how excellent they may be, will scarcely do. We need more substantive monographs to prepare for eventual syntheses.

The advance in turn presupposes overcoming the narrow professionalism that all too often restricts the impact of valuable work to a readership sufficiently perseverant—or resigned—to tolerate poor writing. One sometimes wonders whether that "gray fraternity of political technicians"⁵ now running Eastern Europe may not have found a congenial counterpart in a similarly uninspiring fraternity of scholarly technicians who write about it. Surely there is a message that deserves to be heard beyond the obscurity to which products undistinguished in form are inevitably consigned.

The time has also come for re-dedication to the study and appreciation of values, without which any attempt at understanding Eastern Europe is flawed. This should not lead to a relapse into the shallow self-righteousness that often marred writing in the heyday of the cold war. But neither can we afford to lose sight of those fundamental differences which, aside from the less fundamental similarities, set the variously dismal Communist systems apart from the Western tradition. As Soviet spokesmen never cease to remind us, *détente* means no abatement of ideological

4. Robert C. Tucker, "On the Comparative Study of Communism," *World Politics* (Princeton, NJ), January 1967, p. 246.

5. Zygmunt Bauman in Janos, p. 84.

competition. Sober recognition of this fact of life can spare us much disillusionment not only with détente, but also with the impressive accomplishments of a scholarship of unprecedented promise.

Communist Environmentalism

by Theodore Shabad

IVAN VOLGYES, Ed. *Environmental Deterioration in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. New York, NY, Praeger, 1974.

FRED SINGLETON, Ed. *Environmental Misuse in the Soviet Union*. New York, NY, Praeger, 1976.

WHEN PROBLEMS of environmental protection and resource conservation began to receive wide attention in both East and West in the early 1960's, it was frequently asked which political and economic system was likely to be better equipped to protect the environment. Was it the Western democracies, with their economies built on private enterprise and their democratic institutions of checks and balances? Or was it the Communist countries, with their government-run, centrally planned economies and their pervasive institutions of social control?

Some argued that the Soviet Union and other authoritarian political systems might be expected to be more successful in insuring optimal natural resource management and conservation, assuming, of course, that the ruling group was firmly committed to

such a policy. At the same time, it was recognized that the traditional emphasis such systems placed on production, often to the detriment of nonproductive activities, was likely to undermine measures of environmental protection, which were likely to add to costs without bringing early economic benefits. Moreover, the USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe appeared to lack a key ingredient that had been instrumental in raising environmental consciousness in the West—namely, the presence of an effective citizens' lobby and a conservation-minded public opinion.

In light of these latter factors, it is not surprising that early Western studies of environmental policy and practice in the Soviet Union suggested that the Soviet approach, despite the seemingly effective machinery of social control, provided "no panaceas for the universally encountered problems relating to natural resource development and conservation."¹ Although

the Soviet government showed evidence of commitment and certainly did not lack the means to resolve these problems, its environmental protection efforts appeared to suffer from many of the same inadequacies observed in Western societies.

THE BOOKS reviewed here pick up where the earlier works left off in assessing the environmental problems and approaches of the USSR and, to a lesser extent of Eastern Europe. Both are collections of conference papers, with the volume edited by Ivan Volgyes coming from a congress of the Society of Engineering Science held in Tel Aviv in 1972 and the collection edited by Fred Singleton, from the 1974 international Slavic conference in Banff, Canada. Each compendium enriches our knowledge of environmental issues in the USSR, and—as their titles suggest—both arrive at similarly bleak conclusions about the prospects for the Soviet environment. For example, as Keith Bush concludes in his chapter in the Volgyes volume, "no case has arisen that would unambivalently identify [the Soviet leadership's] true priorities in this respect."

1. Philip R. Pryde, *Conservation in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 178. See also Marshall I. Goldman, *The Spoils of Progress: Environmental Pollution in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1972.