

Mc Dermott, Kevin and Stibbe, Matthew (eds). Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule. Berg, Oxford and New York, 2006. xiv + 210 pp. Notes. Index. £19.99; \$29.96.

REVOLUTION and Resistance in Eastern Europe is a new collection, which seeks to give a succinct reassessment of the crises of communist rule and its final demise in the light of new archival research and post-communist historiography. The collection divides into three sections: 1) the early crises communist regime of the late 1940s and early 1950s, covered in chapters on the Soviet-Yugoslav split; working class protest in the GDR in 1953, and the events of 1956 in Poland and Hungary); 2) the contrasting experiences of communist regimes they endured into 1970s and 1980s, which comprises case studies of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Poland; 3) and, finally, assessments of 'revolutions of '89' themselves in Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary and Poland. In some cases, as with Dennis Deletant's discussion of Ceausescu's Romania or Kieran Williams's analysis of Czechoslovak 'normalization', contributions distil extensive research already published elsewhere. In other instances, contributions by younger scholars tackle engage with more specific issues for the first time. James Krapfl, for example, analyses shifting narratives of revolution during Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution in terms of archetypal literary genres.

Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe succeeds admirably in its principal objective of offering an accessible, up-to-date research-based overview of the decline and fall of key East European communist regimes. In general, the contributions add subtlety and complexity to our understanding of the period rather than challenging dominant interpretations head-on. Deletant, for example, notes that despite the image of Romania as a passive, compliant and atomized society, contrasting with the rebellious nations of Central Europe, pockets of armed resistance did exist and there were recurrent outbreaks of industrial and popular protest. However, although courageous individual dissidents did speak out against the regime and there was a small element of Hungarian language samizdat, the broader truth that Romania lacked a politically minded intellectual opposition capable of thinking through the communist experience is confirmed. Similarly, Williams points up that fragmented evidence we have of Czechoslovak public attitudes under communism suggest considerable interest in politics, despite massive disengagement from the politics of the regime and outward social passivity.

The collection's only real weakness is arguably what it could, but does not, address. First, the book's focus on regime crises and socio-political flashpoints is a somewhat conservative one. Almost two decades after the collapse of communism, it seems surprising that the freeing up of research conditions should not have resulted in greater consideration of day to day functioning of regime and society during 'normal' times. Of the pieces in the collection only Williams' critical consideration of 'normalization' touches on such themes. Second, beyond the familiar pairing of Hungary and Poland in Johanna Granville's chapter on 1956 and Nigel Swain's discussion of their

‘negotiated revolutions’ in 1989, there is little effective comparison. The editors’ introduction offers fairly standard four-fold typology of forms of resistance to communist rule: armed struggle, popular protest, intellectual dissent, and within-systems efforts at reform. But their argument that, beyond this, national diversity precludes further efforts at generalization is not fully convincing. Some parallel phenomena highlighted, such as, for example, the role of working class protest in puncturing regime stability in cases as diverse as the GDR, Romania and Poland, clearly invite comparative discussion. Similarly, Tony Kemp-Welch’s conclusion - a solid but somewhat out-of-place reflection on the relative importance of Soviet and Western policy towards communist Eastern Europe - also misses the opportunity for a more searching cross-national perspective.

Finally, as the foreword by former Czech ambassador to the UK (and historian) Pavel Seifter notes, in much of contemporary Central and Eastern Europe memories of communism are the subject of intense political and cultural conflict. Despite the passing of lustration legislation in Poland and the Czech Republic during 1990s right-wing governments in both countries have sought to implement deeper decommunization fuller opening up of the past as revealed in communist-era archives. Sadly, Seifter’s comment aside, the reader gains little sense of the contemporary resonance of the crises and conflicts analyzed in the collection. Similarly, despite brief mention of the fall of Milošević in 2000, there is little broader perspective on the experience of East European communism and its collapse and how we might read it in an era of ‘coloured revolutions’ against the remnants of nomenklatura power elsewhere in the post-communist world.

Despite such limitation, the uniformly high quality of contributions and consistent blend of sophistication, concision and clarity make Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe far superior to many similar publications, and a collection which can be enthusiastically recommended both to advanced undergraduate and post-graduate students and the usual readership of scholars and specialists.

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