

Fagan, Adam. Environment and Democracy in the Czech Republic: The Environmental Movement in the Transition. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA. Edward Elgar, 2005, vi + 195pp., £49.95.

Environmental movements were prominent in Central and Eastern Europe during the decline of communism, but have since 1989 faded into the background. Adam Fagan's new book examines this and other issues in a detailed case study of environmental movements in the Czech Republic.

In addition to their intrinsic importance, Fagan argues, environmental politics offer unique insights into democratisation processes, because they are at the intersection of decline of communism, civil society development, public policy and Europeanisation. He first surveys the state of the environment in the Czech Republic between 1989 and 1997. Overall, the period saw some environmental improvement. However, Fagan notes, this was largely due to the decline of communist-era heavy industry, rather than better environmental policy-making. Moreover, he warns, new environmental problems generated by the burgeoning Czech consumer economy, such as growth in packaging waste, exhaust emissions and large-scale road-building, have remained unaddressed. Fagan then reviews the different categorisations of green politics and environmentalism, which vary in the depth of their challenge to industrialism and the different organisational strategies they adopt. However, to avoid conceptual stretching and superficial parallels with Western Europe Fagan sidesteps these debates, preferring to refer loosely to 'environmental movement organisations' (EMOs) and using Western EMO typologies merely as ideal types. He then reviews accounts of

EMOs in social movement theory, juxtaposing explanations stressing ‘political opportunity structures’, resource mobilisation theory (RMT), and approaches emphasising the globalisation of conflict between international civil society and transnational capital. The author then presents two detailed chapters of empirical findings, which form the core of the book. The first traces the overall development of Czech environmental movements since 1989. The second presents three detailed case studies of EMOs with contrasting strategies and agendas: the nationally organised ‘Rainbow’ movement, the SOS Prague anti-ring road coalition, and the regionally-based women’s group, South Bohemian Mothers. A final chapter updates the research to 2003, although frustratingly there is no update on the state of the Czech environment.

A major trend identified among Czech EMOs during the 1990s was a shift from protest and grassroots activism to more focused, professionalised efforts to influence policy makers and public opinion. However, Fagan argues, this should not be interpreted as paralleling similar patterns among Western EMOs. Rather than reflecting more inclusive policy-making or growing interest in the green issues amongst politicians, for Czech EMOs it was a defensive reaction against the 1992-7 Klaus governments’ lack of interest in the environment and contempt for environmentalists. However, Fagan’s analysis also reveals a complex picture of strategy mixing and EMO diversification. Some activists, for example, are now turning away from high level lobbying to new style of local grassroots campaigning linking with existing community activism.

In theoretical terms, Fagan suggests, Czech EMOs development supports resource mobilisation theories, rather than political opportunity structure explanations or globalisation approaches. For, Fagan argues, the stance of political elites in the Czech

Republic was more important for EMOs' strategies and success than formal institutional structures. This is sharply illustrated by the abrupt change of policy following the election of the centre-right Klaus government in 1992. However, most significant for Czech EMO weakness, Fagan suggests, was their lack of resources and inability or unwillingness to gain significant financial support from the Czech public. This produced a striking dependency on short-term grants from foreign foundations and latterly the EU. This Fagan argues, has seen many Czech EMOs forced into the role of sub-contracting for foreign organisations or policing aspects of *acquis* implementation. Lack of resources and resource dependency, he concludes, also prevented Czech EMOs from playing any significant role in international anti-globalisation movements.

Despite its title and well argued research rationale, Environment and Democracy ultimately offers limited insights into democratisation. That environmental groups struggled to establish themselves in post-communist democratic politics, despite good initial prospects, seems part of the wider story of stunted civil society development after 1989. Fagan's argument that the weaknesses of Czech EMOs were path dependently 'locked in' in the early 1990s is more arresting. However, it is never examined at any length and the case for environmental politics as 'lens on transition' ultimately seems unproven. More problematic is the book's failure to put Czech environmental politics convincingly into national or European context. The book invests considerable energy unpicking the differences between Czech and West European EMOs, but, except for a passing reference (p. 117), it never relates the Czech case to other CEE states. It is thus difficult to judge whether the impacts of transition on Czech EMOs were a local phenomenon or part of a more general trend. Instead, the book exasperatingly reduces the wider context to a series of formulaic

Radical Political Economy claims about the omnipresence and omnipotence of neo-liberal capitalism and transnational corporations. As with much RPE analysis, however, these forces and linkages remain largely abstract and off stage. For example, despite excellent fine grain analysis of a host of EMOs and campaigns, only four foreign or multinational companies are ever identified by name (p. 96. p. 128, p. 137). A similarly cavalier approach is taken to national politics. The post-1989 Czech state is dismissed as ‘a vehicle for ensuring the flow of capital and the protection of western interests’ (p. 171), a description hard to square with the efforts of politicians of right and left to restrict foreign ownership in the early 1990s. Given that Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Communists control some two thirds of the Czech parliament, it is also surprising to read that ‘all sections of the political elite steadfastly endorse’ the ideological hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism (p.175). It seems similarly sweeping to view the EU’s complex and contradictory enlargement agendas as spearheading the advance of neo-liberalism into CEE (p. 118).

Overall however, Environment and Democracy is succinct well-written and scrupulously researched book, whose wilder forays detract little from a varied and insightful account of Czech environmental politics.

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