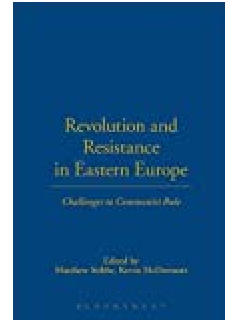

Kevin McDermott, Matthew Stibbe. *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule.* Dorset: Berg Publishers, 2006. 224 S. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84520-259-0.

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A Whole That Is Less Than Its Impressive Parts

This slim volume has many, many features to recommend it. It brings together established scholars working on different parts of the trajectory of Communist rule from England, the United States, Germany, and Russia. While allowing them to focus on their primary chronological and geographic areas of research, the editors have asked them to inform the broader academic community about advances since the end of Communist rule. The authors, for the most part, take this responsibility seriously, meaning that almost all of the essays in the collection should be required reading for scholars of Communist-era Eastern Europe, regardless of their particular focus. However, and this should not be read as an attempt to put anyone off reading the fine contributions collected here, the very diversity of the content and the difficult nature of corralling different experiences of "resistance" and "revolution" mean that the collection holds together less well than a thematically, geographically, or chronologically focused one would have.

The book is divided into three chronologically arranged parts, with the first devoted to the periods of Stalinism and de-Stalinization. Leonid Gibianskii's essay on the Soviet-Yugoslav split draws somewhat on one of his earlier pieces, and is quite successful in presenting the information that has recently come out of the archives.[1] Most important is the fact that, because most of the material at scholars' disposal until recently came from the Yugoslav side, we had really only heard one side of the story of how the split evolved. Gibianskii, basing his work on newly available documents, convincingly shows that, until very near the clash, the Soviets' assessment of Yugoslav domestic policy was quite positive and that their dissatisfaction was not linked to Yugoslavia's support for the Greek Communists, to its position on Palestine (which differed from the Soviets'), or to its attitude toward the Marshall Plan. Instead, the Soviets became anxious over Yugoslavia's actions on other international issues, especially its moves toward Bulgaria and its designs on Albania. Here, the general motivation for the split–the urge of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to bring the Eastern European Communist parties under their control–is confirmed, with the

Yugoslavs' taking of action without Moscow's prior consent its proximate cause. The spark, Gibianskii argues, was inside information received from Yugoslav politburo member Sreten Zujovic and sent back to the USSR by the Soviet ambassador in Belgrade, Anatolii Lavrent'ev.

The following piece, by the coeditor Matthew Stibbe, analyzes the June 1953 uprising in East Germany (GDR) utilizing a somewhat different approach. Likely because of the vast amount of research that has been done on the former GDR since 1989, he judiciously mixes a few nuggets from the archives with an overview of the most important findings from the relevant secondary literature to make two points. First, he argues convincingly that the crisis was not solely a workers' uprising, but a broader movement. However, the support for the uprising should not be overly exaggerated, especially since it found little support among students, intellectuals, or church leaders. Further, he demonstrates that the GDR's Communist leadership may have precipitated the crisis by acting independently of Moscow. Its behavior was motivated by insecurity over the Soviets' ultimate plans for East Germany, and the difficulties it spawned almost caused the replacement of Walter Ulbricht and did cause lasting damage to party unity.

Johanna Granville compares Poland and Hungary in 1956, rounding out the first part with a revised version of an essay published earlier.[2] In detailing why the Soviets intervened in one and not the other, she finds the main differences between the two lying in two crucial and related areas. First, the Polish leadership's ability to manage the June crisis in Poznan led the Soviets to believe that the Poles could handle the October disturbances as well (with Soviet fears of how to end any military intervention, and the appearance of grave problems in Hungary contributing). Second, Wladyslaw Gomulka's popularity was based on solid support in the working class and within a leadership that clearly understood the problems Polish society faced and had a plan for solving them. Imre Nagy's popularity, which cannot be disputed, led "his colleagues, other institutions and press organs to take initiatives without his knowledge or permission," leading to confusion within the Hungarian party that raised serious Soviet concern about its ability to control the situation (p. 69).

Part 2 opens with a wide-ranging essay by Dennis Deletant on the entirety of Communist-era Romania, drawing much of his material from studies and memoirs published in the 1990s. He finds isolated acts of "resistance" in the armed peasant struggle that plagued the regime through the 1950s, especially the band formed by Gheorghe Arsenescu and Toma Arnatoiu, and the one that coalesced around Ion Gavrila-Ogoreanu. He also sheds much light on incidents of "collective protest," including the well-known Jiu Valley miners' strike of 1977. He uses the lack of solidarity between intellectuals and workers at times of collective protest to spring into his discussion of "dissent," which he usefully distinguishes from "nonconformism." Here, he focuses not just on Paul Goma (who emigrated to France in 1977 in any case), but on the activities of the courageous Doina Cornea and the father and son from within the ranks of the Hungarian Reformed Church, Istvan and Laszlo Tokes. His survey of developments is surefooted and his clear delineation of terms is useful.

Kieran Williams follows with an essay on the Prague Spring, placing emphasis on those aspects about which we have learned the most since 1989.[3] Drawing on many archival documents, he privileges the importance of the relationships between Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders over the machinations within the CPSU Politburo in the decision to invade, and demonstrates that the Czechoslovak Communist leadership shared many of the anxieties expressed by the Soviets. He then summarizes the evolution of resistance to the post-invasion regime, shows that the purge of party members that began in March 1970 was far less destructive than we had earlier imagined, and reveals that, unlike earlier believed, Slovak developments were far more diverse and vibrant expressing more than merely a single-minded interest in federalization. He then briefly examines public opinion surveys from the 1970s and 1980s, an era that still represents a lacuna in studies of the history of Czechoslovakia. He concludes by reflecting that the main effect of the opening of the archives on our understanding of the Czechoslovak crisis is that the documents show "how little the participants–those who would later collaborate with the invasion and those who would oppose it–diverged in their political language and outlook" (p. 113). The final essay in the section is the weakest in the collection, with Bartosz Kaliski providing a short summary of the events of the Solidarity era, and basing his account on secondary sources that often predate the end of communism.

The final part begins with Nigel Swain's comparative recapitulation of the "negotiated revolutions" in Poland and Hungary. He provides a valuable review of the recent literature on the origins of the round table talks, the agendas of the opposition groupings and the respective Communist parties, and the outcomes that resulted

in each case. Although largely based on secondary materials, his analysis, which stresses the differing origins and the different content of the opposition parties' agendas, both makes for an interesting overview and shows the value of the comparative approach.

The penultimate essay, by Peter Grieder, assesses the relative importance of the internal defects of the GDR, West Germany's Ostpolitik, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the popular movement of the East German people in the stunning events of November 1989. He argues that the state's weaknesses, especially in the economy, made it vulnerable, and that Ostpolitik had made the GDR indebted to the point of dependence on its Western analogue. However, "Gorbachev not only made the 1989 revolution possible, he actively incited it.... Rarely in history has so much been owed by so many to one man" (p. 171). He is quick to note, however, that Gorbachev's incitement required the East Germans themselves to mobilize and pressure the regime into collapse. While some may disagree with the level of emphasis Grieder places on Gorbachev, he certainly lays out the main issues in succinct fashion, and includes a discussion of the reasons why a "Chinese solution" to the demonstrations was not chosen.

Finally, James Krapfl contributes perhaps the most refreshing essay in the volume, one that defies easy summary but should be read by all interested in the region. Borrowing from Northrop Frye's theory of plot structures, he traces the ways in which various Czechs and Slovaks considered the "Velvet revolution" from its beginning into 1992, concluding that they experienced it as a revolution, even if whether it was in fact one or not is dependent on the narrative frame used in describing the events. He finds the narrative from the revolutionary days of November 17-21 to be characterized by "romantic" plotting, in which good battles evil for domination. In the period surrounding the negotiations between Civic Forum and the regime, in late November and early December, "comedic" plotting, in which the transcendence of romanticism is qualified and competing interests strive for reconciliation, came forward. These two ways of understanding the tumultuous events still ongoing battled one another, in Krapfl's view, until the elections of June 1990. Thereafter, voices criticizing the leadership of Civic Forum as out of touch with the rank and file and having allowed the revolution to be stolen through reconciliation with the Communists began to be heard. Krapfl calls this "tragic" plotting, as it stresses the search for a flaw within the protagonist to explain a catastrophe. The final plotting structure, "satire," takes tragedy a step farther, seeing most human action as meaningless, and painting the so-called revolution as, in reality, a conspiracy. Krapfl's approach is both novel and fruitful, and this reviewer hopes that others, whose foci lie on the other countries of Eastern Europe, will follow it, so that we can determine if there is a common understanding that developed over time regarding the events of the *annus mirabilis*. Tony Kemp-Welch closes the volume with reflections on East-West relations during the Cold War.

From all of the above, it should be clear that almost every essay in the collection is valuable. Either they bring to light new information from the archives (Gibianskii, Granville, and Williams), provide useful and systematic overviews of recent research (Stibbe, Deletant, Swain, and Grieder), or introduce a new way of looking at events that have been well chronicled in the literature (Krapfl). Although the collection is undoubtedly excellent, it is noticeably unfocused. The editors' introduction makes this clear. They borrow Lynne Viola's extremely expansive definition of "resistance," and adopt an equally broad definition of "revolution," taking it to mean "sudden/violent or gradual/negotiated transformations that are either predominantly social in nature, or predominantly political, or both" (p. 3). This leads them to present a four-part typology of "challenges to communist rule" that strikes this reviewer as less than satisfying (p. 3). The first "national communism" is, by its very nature, not a challenge to Communist rule, but to Soviet domination. The other three–intellectual dissent, armed peasant resistance, and popular protest–do not really take us very far, and, taken together, all four seem more designed to provide space for each essay to "fit" into the volume rather than to advance our theoretical understanding. The lack of a strong overarching frame that would serve to integrate this chronologically and geographically diverse collection should not, however, dissuade readers from reading it. It is well worth the time.

[1]. See Leonid Gibianskii, "The 1948 Soviet-Yugoslav Clash: Historiographic Versions and New Archival Sources," in *Jugoslavija v hladni vojni–Yugoslavia in the Cold War*, ed. Jasna Fischer, et al. (Ljubljana: Institut za novejso zgodovino; and Toronto: Stalin-Era Archives and Research Project, 2004), 49-70.

[2]. Johanna Granville, "Poland and Hungary, 1956: A Comparative Essay Based on New Archival Findings," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 48 (2002): 369-395. See also Johanna Granville, *The First Domino: International Decision Making during the Hungarian Crisis of 1956* (College Station: Texas A and M Press, 2004).

[3]. Much of the information and conclusions he presents can be found in his excellent *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics 1968-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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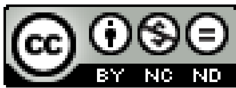

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