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978-1-107-02388-8 - Transitions and Non-Transitions from Communism: Regime Survival in China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam

Steven Saxonberg

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Transitions and Non-Transitions from Communism

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, many scholars have sought to explain the collapse of communism. Yet, more than two decades on, communist regimes continue to rule in a diverse set of countries including China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam. In a unique study of fourteen countries, Steven Saxonberg explores the reasons for the survival of some communist regimes while others fell. He also shows why the process of collapse differed among communist-led regimes in Europe, Africa, and Latin America. Based on the analysis of the different processes of collapse that has already taken place, and taking into account the special characteristics of the remaining communist regimes, *Transitions and Non-Transitions from Communism* discusses the future prospects for the survival of the regimes in China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam.

Steven Saxonberg is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the Masaryk University in the Czech Republic. He has published over fifty articles in journals and books on the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the post-communist developments in this area. His first book, *The Fall: A Comparative Study of the End of Communism in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland* (2001), was awarded second place in the UNESCO Stein Rokkan competition for Best Book in Comparative Social Science.

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To my wife Danka

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Preface

This book has been a long journey for me. As I finally finished the manuscript and reread it to make corrections, the very first sentence of the very first chapter summed up the journey: “Although the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe caught the world by surprise, more than one decade later it is somehow assumed that this system *had* to fall.” By this point, of course, I have had to change that first sentence from “more than *one* decade later” to “more than *two* decades later”!

The adventure began when Mark Thompson contacted me about writing a book together. I had recently completed my doctoral dissertation on the collapse of communism in Central Europe (Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland) and I thought I was basically finished with that topic. I was ready to go in new directions in my research and I had made a start on investigating post-communist social policy. However, my Ph.D. advisor knew Mark Thompson and gave him a copy of my doctoral dissertation. Mark then invited me to participate in the meeting of the American Political Science Association in Atlanta in 1999. Although I was fearful of the hot weather that doubtless awaited me in the deep South in late August (I had been living in Sweden for many years and had become accustomed to a colder climate), I have never frozen so much in my entire life. I was given a crude reminder that Americans are the biggest energy consumers in the world. I found myself losing an ongoing battle with the cleaning lady at our hotel, who insisted on turning the air conditioning back on every day, just to make sure I would wake up feeling like an ice cube. Luckily, I got along much better with Mark than with the cleaning lady. Together with Juan López, we agreed to write a book on transitions and non-transitions from communism.

Since my part of the book was to be about the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and since I had already written a book on four of these countries, I thought my share of the project would be rather easy (especially since I also knew a fair amount about the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia). Mark, for his part, was an expert on Asia and also knowledgeable about Central and Eastern Europe. Juan was an expert on

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Latin America and was about to finish a book on Cuba. I knew, therefore, that we could write the manuscript in a couple of years. And I was right, we could! But we did not.

The project took off seriously when I was able to arrange a scholarship from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, so that Mark and Juan could visit Sweden. This induced them each to write a draft chapter. Meanwhile, full of energy, I wrote three draft chapters. We then toured Sweden like a rock group. We presented our project at the departments of political science at Södertörn College and Örebro University, at the department of sociology at Uppsala University, and at a general social-science seminar at Dalarna University College. Here I would like especially to thank Anders Uhlin, Sten Berglund, Tom Burns, and Lars Petterson for arranging these seminars. I would also like to thank Helena Flam for organizing a seminar at Leipzig University. I would also like to thank David Ost and Bogdan Szajkowski for giving me comments at a seminar arranged by Dalarna University College.

Since I am relatively new to studying Asia, I also benefited greatly through e-mail exchanges with Bruce Cumings, who was kind enough to discuss some issues concerning North Korea with me.

Despite my initial enthusiasm for the project, however, my co-authors dropped out for a variety of personal reasons. Juan was the first to leave. While he did not write any portion of the text in this book, Juan did help me to understand Latin America much better. Among other things, he made me realize that, due to certain special conditions in Cuba, professionals in that country – rather than intellectuals – are the main driving force behind the opposition. He also persuaded me to rethink my original view of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, as I had believed that they were basically democratic socialists, but he made me realize that they were Leninists, who sought to install a dictatorship. At the end of the book, I take a more critical view than Juan does of the US boycott against Cuba. Notwithstanding this difference, however, I am greatly in debt to Juan for his inspiration, and I am certain this would have been a much better book had he decided to remain in the project.

I also discussed the project with Mark many times over the years – via e-mail, by telephone, and in personal meetings in Erlangen, Germany (where he had a professorship), in Falun, Sweden (where I had a lecture-ship), and in Prague (where I have spent most of my time these past few years). Some of the ideas that made it into this book come from Mark, especially his classification of “failed totalitarian regimes.” He also encouraged me to expand upon my idea of “pragmatic acceptance” as a type of social contract established by regimes which have lost their ideological legitimacy. The original version of this concept in my doctoral

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dissertation (later published as *The Fall*) concerned the way in which regimes in Central and Eastern Europe defended their continued rule after Soviet invasions or threats of invasion, but I did not think the term could be used for countries outside of the Warsaw Pact. Mark encouraged me, however, to develop the concept in such a way as to make it applicable to countries such as Cuba and China. While Mark discovered he did not have the time to work on this project, he did co-author about 20 percent of Chapter 2. As with Juan, I am sure the book would have been much better if he had stayed on. Mark also read and gave me comments on earlier versions of chapters 1 and 4.

A few days before I sent my final version to Cambridge University Press, the “Dear Leader,” as Kim Jong Il was known, passed away in North Korea. Unfortunately, I did not have the time to rewrite the sections on North Korea and take into account this recent event; however, so far nothing has happened that would cause me to change fundamentally my analysis of the North Korean situation.

I would also like to thank the Baltic Sea Foundation in Sweden, as well as the Czech Grant Agency (GA403/09/1182, and GAP404/10/1586) and the Swedish Research Council (dnr 421–2010–2264), for partial funding of the research for this book.

Finally, I would like to end this preface by mentioning a famous phrase – to the effect that, behind every successful man there is a woman, and behind every successful woman there is her shadow. Although I certainly hope I am more than a shadow for my wife, Danka, the first part of the proverb at any rate is correct. I would never have been able to complete this book without her love and support, which she gives me “eight days a week.” Thank you, Danka!