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978-0-521-58592-7 - Subversive Institutions: The Design and Destruction of Socialism and the State

Valerie Bunce

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# SUBVERSIVE INSTITUTIONS

## *The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State*

From 1989 to 1992, all of the socialist dictatorships in Europe (including the Soviet Union) collapsed, as did the Soviet bloc. Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia dismembered, and the cold war international order came to an abrupt end. Based on a series of controlled comparisons among regimes and states, Valerie Bunce argues in this book that two factors account for these remarkable developments: the institutional design of socialism as a regime, a state, and a bloc, and the rapid expansion during the 1980s of opportunities for domestic and international change. When combined, institutions and opportunities explain not just when, how, and why these regimes and states disintegrated, but also some of the most puzzling features of these developments – why, for example, the collapse of socialism was largely peaceful and why Yugoslavia, but not the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia, disintegrated through war.

Valerie Bunce is Professor in the Department of Government at Cornell University. She currently serves as Chair of the ACLS/SSRC Committee on Eastern Europe and has previously been the Director of the Russian and Eastern European Studies Program at Cornell. She is the author of *Do New Leaders Make a Difference?*, and she has published widely, in English, Russian, Hungarian, and Croatian, on politics and government. Her research has been supported by numerous bodies, including the U.S. Institute for Peace, the German Marshall Fund, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Carnegie Endowment, and the Russell Sage Foundation.

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## P R E F A C E

**T**his book seeks to explain two recent, remarkable, and related events: the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe from 1989 to 1990 and the dismemberment soon thereafter of the Soviet, Yugoslav, and Czechoslovak states. The forces that seem to have driven these processes were the interaction between the institutional design of socialist regimes and states, on the one hand, and the considerable expansion of opportunities for change in the 1980s. The end of socialism and of the state, therefore, were both abrupt and long in the making. And both sets of events spoke to the power of socialist institutions even as these institutions were collapsing.

Embedded in the issues of regime and state collapse, however, is a series of other important questions that this study addresses as well. In particular, there are the variations in how and when these regimes and states ended. Why, for example, were some regime transitions peaceful and others violent? Why did Yugoslavia end in war, and the Soviet and Czechoslovak states through a peaceful process? Why did socialism collapse, first, in Poland and Hungary, and only later in the Soviet Union – despite the immediacy of the Gorbachev reforms in the latter? This leads to a final puzzle that speaks to commonalities rather than variance. Why did *all* the Communist parties of the region, despite their differences in socialism and circumstances, lose their hegemonic position? The answers to these questions are also largely historical-institutional in nature.

In the course of addressing these issues, this book also pursues two other objectives. One is to use the socialist experience in order to address questions of broader theoretical and geographical significance. It is not just

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that the recent collapse of regime and state in the eastern half of Europe speaks nearly by definition to a broad range of the literature in comparative politics – including, for example, the work on nations, nationalism, and secession; on revolution; on the role of institutions in politics; and on transitions from dictatorship to democracy and from one international regime to another. It is also that the socialist context provides us with a large number of cases and, through its mixture of similarities and differences, facilitates controlled comparisons and robust conclusions.

The other objective of this book is to challenge the recent assumption that the knowledge accumulated about European socialism over the course of the cold war period was deficient, because specialists failed to anticipate the events of 1989 and after, and largely irrelevant, because a new era has begun and socialism has become yesterday's news. This book begs to differ on both counts. First, as the long bibliography testifies, those who specialized in the region do have a great deal to say – and said it, moreover, without the advantages of hindsight. Second, much of what they had to say focused on institutions and their consequences, a topic that, while long of interest to specialists in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the socialist era, has only recently occupied center stage in the disciplines of political science and sociology. Finally, without these arguments and without knowledge of the institutional and historical evolution of socialism, we could not have explained why, when, and how socialist regimes and states ended – and the variations therein. This book, then, explains what happened by relying not just on recent studies but also on older investigations carried out by scholars years before the end of the socialist story was in sight.

This book testifies, therefore, to the power of the past – that is, the socialist past and past work by specialists in the field. In this sense, it has been, like the revolutions that toppled socialism and the state, long in the making. Indeed, this book was begun twenty years ago when I, like others, began to puzzle over several trends in the Communist world: economic decline and a seeming reversal of power distributions, wherein the strong (or the party-states) were acting as though they were weak and the weak (or the societies they dominated) as though they were strong. Moreover, both trends were in clear evidence, whether the focus of the analysis was on Soviet-style socialism or the Yugoslav variant of self-management, on the domestic political economy of European socialism or its international equivalent, the Soviet bloc.

Since that time, I have benefited greatly from the work of a large number of scholars in Communist area studies and in comparative politics. Many of those scholars are thanked by virtue of their inclusion in the



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