

**TRANSNATIONAL INFLUENCES IN THE
TRANSITION FROM COMMUNISM**

Archie Brown

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Archie Brown is Professor of Politics at Oxford University and Director of the Russian and East European Centre at St Antony's College, Oxford, where he has been a Fellow since 1971. He has held Visiting Professorships of Political Science at Yale University, the University of Connecticut, Columbia University, and the University of Texas at Austin. In the fall semester of 1998 Professor Brown was Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Kellogg Institute. Among his numerous publications, Archie Brown is the author of *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford University Press, 1996; paperback, 1997) which in 1998 won the W.J.M. Mackenzie Prize of the Political Studies Association of the UK for best political science book of its year and (jointly) the Alec Nove Prize of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies for best book or article on Russia, Communism, or post-Communism. His most recent book (as coeditor with Brian Barry and Jack Hayward and as author of the chapter on "The Study of Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism") is *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century* (The British Academy with Oxford University Press, 1999). Professor Brown was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1991 and has been Chair of its Political Studies Section since 1999.

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ABSTRACT

Archie Brown examines the variety of transnational influences that profoundly shaped and made possible the transition from Communism in Europe. Attention is devoted to: Western influences on Eastern Europe; the impact of the West on Soviet decisionmakers; the influence of East European countries on each other; and the significance of transformative change in the Soviet Union for the East European transitions. The author argues that the interconnections among the transitions in the Eastern part of the European continent were so strong that they should be regarded as a discrete political phenomenon—a Fourth Wave of democratization rather than part of the Third Wave that began in the first half of the 1970s. Under late Communism there was significant influence on the Soviet elite from the West (in ways that have been underexplored) and, to a *lesser* extent, from Eastern Europe—until 1989 when the demonstration effects of successful East European rejection of Soviet hegemony had a profound impact on the Baltic states in particular. Yet, the facilitation and timing of the transition from Communism—the decisive breakthrough of 1989—was dependent, above all, on pluralizing change in Moscow and the policy choices of the post-1985 Soviet leadership.

RESUMEN

Archie Brown examina la variedad de influencias transnacionales que conformaron decisivamente e hicieron posible la transición desde el comunismo en Europa. La atención se concentra en: las influencias occidentales en Europa del Este; el impacto de Occidente sobre los decisores soviéticos; las influencias mutuas entre los países este-europeos; y la importancia de las transformaciones en la Unión Soviética para las transiciones en Europa del Este. El autor sostiene que las conexiones entre las transiciones en los países de la parte Este del continente europeo fueron tan fuertes que deben ser consideradas como un sólo fenómeno político: una cuarta ola de democratización en lugar de parte de la tercer ola que comenzó en la segunda mitad de los setentas. Bajo el comunismo tardío existieron importantes influencias sobre la elite soviética de Occidente (en formas que han sido insuficientemente exploradas) y, *en menor medida*, de Europa del Este, hasta 1989, cuando los efectos de demostración del exitoso rechazo este-europeo de la hegemonía soviética tuvieron su profundo impacto, particularmente en los países bálticos. Sin embargo, la simplificación y la oportunidad de la transición desde el comunismo—el quiebre decisivo de 1989—dependieron, sobre todo, de un cambio pluralizante en Moscú y de las opciones de política de la dirigencia soviética pos-1985.

The transition from Communism, it hardly needs saying, has to be distinguished from transition to democracy. Of the twenty-eight formerly Communist states, fewer than half of them can today be firmly categorized as democratic.¹ Many possess significant democratic elements, including contested elections—a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. A number of them are *hybrid* or *mixed politics*—a category in which it is reasonable to include Russia.² Others have made the transition from a distinctively Communist type of post-totalitarian authoritarianism to a different kind of authoritarian regime. The criteria for determining how much democracy makes a state democratic are, of course, debatable. Following Robert Dahl, most scholars are conscious that the states we normally call ‘democracies’ are ‘polyarchies’, although, like Dahl himself, we do not subsequently eschew the word, ‘democracy’, in writing about the political systems conventionally embraced by that concept.³

It should be easier to get agreement on what constitutes transition *from* Communism than to agree on what these various states are in transition *to* or to achieve common ground concerning what point in a transition process (to democracy or a market economy) they have reached. Yet, there is a need to distinguish even the most authoritarian of post-Communist regimes from the Communist systems out of which they emerged,

¹ There are twenty-nine post-Communist states if one includes the GDR, but since it became not a successor state but part of the larger Federal Republic of Germany, it is a case apart. The number of states is likely to increase, partly as a result of continuing fissiparous tendencies in former and present Yugoslavia.

² For elaboration of that point, see Archie Brown, “The Russian Crisis: Beginning of the End or End of the Beginning?” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 15, n. 1, 1999, 56–73; and Brown, “Russia and Democratization,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 46, n. 5, 1999, 3–13. See also Lilia Shevtsova (ed.), *Rossiia: desyat’ voprosov o samom vazhnom* (Carnegie Centre, Moscow, 1997), 14–22.

³ See, for example, Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1971); Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs. Control* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1982); and Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989).

especially since the continued presence of former Communist leaders in positions of power has led some commentators to suggest that that perhaps the ‘post’ may be misplaced in ‘post-Communism’.⁴ It is important, then, to be clear about what we mean by **Communism**. Elsewhere I have elaborated at greater length what I hold to be its five major defining features.⁵ Taken together, they differentiated Communist systems from other authoritarian or totalitarian regimes and, still more fundamentally, from pluralist systems in which socialist parties of a social democratic type have held office.⁶ These characteristics

⁴ In the words of Valerie Bunce: “One analyst’s democratization is another’s postcommunism—and a third might question whether postcommunism is so ‘post’” (“Should Transitologists be Grounded?” *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, n. 1, Spring 1995, 111–27, at 119). The presence of former Communists in positions of power has been more readily accepted in some countries than others. In Poland, Andrzej Walicki has suggested, “hostility towards the old political elite was caused **not by its opposition** to market economy and democracy **but by its successful adaptation** to these new conditions.” The “more successful the former communists appear to have been in using the democratic rules of the game and in promoting economic reforms,” observes Walicki, “the louder have been the demands for decommunization...” See Andrzej S. Walicki, “Transitional Justice and the Political Struggles of Post-Communist Poland,” in A. James McAdams (ed.), *Transitional Justice and the Rule of Law in New Democracies* (Kellogg Institute series with the University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1997), 185–237, at 204.

⁵ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1996), 310–315.

⁶ Many Western scholars call Communist systems socialist, sometimes using the less misleading variant of ‘state socialism’. One justification for the adjective ‘socialist’ is that this is what the regimes called themselves. But the power-holders within Communist states, for most of the Communist era, claimed also that their countries were democratic, and hardly any Western specialist felt the need to take that self-ascription at face value. Ideologists in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe attacked the concept of ‘democratic socialism’ not only, as they argued, because socialism was ‘of its essence democratic’ but because that was the term used by their ideological enemies, the socialist parties of a social democratic type in Western Europe who formed the Socialist International. Countless books were published in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe praising ‘socialist democracy’—as distinct from ‘democratic socialism’! But ‘socialism’, historically, has not been the preserve of Communists and most members of West European social democratic parties did not accept that a one-party dictatorship, supported by a bloated security police,

were: (1) the supreme authority and unchallengeable hegemony of the Communist Party, for which the official euphemism was ‘the leading role of the party’; (2) a high degree of centralization and discipline within that organization with very narrowly defined rights of intraparty debate—which was what ‘democratic centralism’ meant in practice; (3) state or, at any rate, nonprivate ownership of the means of production, with exceptions sometimes made for agricultural, but not for industrial, production; (4) the declared aim of building communism (i.e. the utopia of a self-governing society in which the state apparatus would have ‘withered away’) as the ultimate, legitimizing goal; and (5) a sense of belonging to—and, in the Soviet case, of leading—an international Communist movement. On these criteria it can be argued that the Soviet Union ceased to have a Communist **system** as early as 1989—long before the generally favored end-dates for Soviet Communism, i.e., when the CPSU was banned on Russian territory by Boris Yel’tsin’s decree of August 1991 or when the Soviet flag was lowered from the Kremlin in December of that year. Only one of the five defining features of Communism still remained relatively intact by the summer of 1989—the third—but, even in that case, by no means completely, for ‘co-operatives’, many of which were in all but name private enterprises, had already emerged in that early stage of transition to a mixed (ownership) economy. So far as the first criterion is concerned, it

constituted socialism at all. Given that over many decades socialist parties in Europe were the main rivals (and, in most countries, the successful rivals) of Communist Parties for the working-class vote, it is unhelpful to blur the distinction between non-Communist socialists and Communists by classifying states ruled by Communist Parties as ‘socialist’. On this point I have a serious terminological disagreement—which on occasion becomes a substantive one—with Valerie Bunce in her nonetheless stimulating book, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1999). Thus, Bunce writes of Mikhail Gorbachev’s “overriding concern” with “saving Soviet socialism and protecting his reforms...” (*Subversive Institutions*, 134), but nothing is more important in that context than Gorbachev’s evolution from upholder of Soviet Communism (the Communist variant of ‘socialism’) to advocate of socialism of a social democratic type—a qualitative change, the significance of which is somewhat obscured if seen simply as a continuing attachment to ‘socialism’.

might be objected that it was not until March 1990 that the monopolistic position of the Communist Party was removed from the Soviet Constitution, but, in practice, that constitutional change *followed* the loss of the party's unchallenged and unchallengeable hegemony rather than *preceding* it.

This working paper is concerned with the process of dismantling, or breaking with, a Communist system rather than with the transition in a longer post-Communist perspective, and, more specifically, with the international dimension of that earlier process. Transitions—certainly in the case of transition from Communism—can be divided into three stages: erosion, breakthrough, and reconstruction. The stages are clearer in some countries than others. In Poland and Hungary it really was a long goodbye to Communism. The stage of erosion of the system was a lengthy one. Yet, for *all* of these European Communist states the year of definitive breakthrough was 1989. This was followed by the stage of transition not just *from* Communism but *to* something different, the stage of reconstruction in the sense of constructing a new system. Transnational influences in that third stage have, of course, become increasingly obvious. *After* the crucial breaks with a Communist polity and a relatively isolated command economy were made, the political elites became ever more receptive to Western advice and the incentives offered by Western governments and Western-dominated international economic institutions.⁷ The post-Communist economies became increasingly intertwined with, and dependent on, the global economy, and the summer of 1998 produced spectacular examples of transnational economic contagion, although the effects of the East Asian economic turmoil on the former Communist

⁷ That the cosy relationships which ensued were often counterproductive for the broader societies and of benefit (particularly in the case of Russia) chiefly to a relatively narrow circle of donors, consultants, and recipients is the theme of Janine R. Wedel's *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe 1989–1998* (Macmillan, London, 1998) and Wedel, "Rigging the US-Russian Relationship: Harvard, Chubais, and the Transidentity Game," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, vol. 7, n. 4, Fall 1999, 469–500.

countries were by no means entirely capricious. The East-Central European countries—where progress in political and legal institution-building and in economic management have been, on the whole, far greater than in the successor states to the Soviet Union—weathered the storm with fewer traumas than, to take the most important example, Russia. There, in the words of the 1998 EBRD Report, “the turbulence following the East Asian crisis exposed in a dramatic fashion the frailties of [Russia’s] economic governance and reforms.”⁸

Yet, even before the break with Marxism-Leninism the economies of Communist countries were, naturally, not immune from international economic trends. The Soviet Union, as an energy-exporting economy, benefited hugely in the short term from the rise in oil prices in the 1970s, although this helped to disguise from the Brezhnev leadership deep-seated problems of lack of economic innovation as well as the secular decline in the rate of growth. Equally, the decline in the price of oil in the second half of the 1980s did nothing to cushion Gorbachev’s reforms, although it did make clearer the need for far-reaching economic transformation. To a significant degree, however, Communist states had a choice in *pre*transition times about the extent of their involvement in the world economy. Thus, Poland, with its heavy borrowing from Western banks in the first half of the 1970s, exacerbated its economic problems and found itself more dependent both on the West, to which it was indebted, and on the USSR, which was prepared to bail it out at a political price—the price of greater regime responsiveness to Soviet political pressures. Czechoslovakia, in contrast, although it, too, suffered from the backwardness of its industry, had very little debt burden at the time of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, as a result of the caution of its conservative Communist rulers and their fear, ever since 1968, of greater involvement with the West.

⁸ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Transition Report 1998* (EBRD, London, 1998), 3.

The principal focus, however, of this paper is on the process of transition from Communism in the Eastern part of the European continent. Although these states have continued to adapt to a post-Communist world in a variety of different ways, by the end of the 1980s they had already (a) made a breakthrough to political pluralism and (b) largely abandoned a command economy and the world of five-year-plans. In some cases, notably those of Hungary and Yugoslavia, substantial concessions to the market had come much earlier. Five questions, in particular, are addressed (though not seriatim) in the pages that follow: (1) Are the transitions from Communism part of what is known in the political science literature as the *Third Wave* of democratization? (2) How significant were *Western* influences directly *on Eastern Europe* in the transition from Communism? (3) How important was the influence of *East European countries on one another or on the Soviet Union* in the transition process? (4) How consequential were *Western influences on the Soviet Union* in producing the transformation of the Soviet system? And (5) How significant was *change in the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the East European transitions*?

The Fourth Wave

Samuel Huntington is among the many comparativists who include developments in the East European countries in the second half of the 1980s in the ‘Third Wave’ of democratization, which he sees as having begun with Portugal in 1974.⁹ It is clear that to include transitions from Communism, in general, in the ‘Third Wave’ of *democratization* must be an oversimplification, for a majority of the transitions are to a non-Communist form of hybrid or authoritarian rule. That does not in itself exclude the possibility of including a majority of the *European* transitions from Communism in the ‘Third Wave’. There are, however, other good reasons why one should refrain from doing so. Even in the

⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman and London, 1991).

cases of transition from Communism that *have* involved a democratization process, the influence in Eastern Europe of the transition to democracy in southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, Greece) in the 1970s was marginal and the influence of the transition process in a number of Latin American countries nonexistent. Moreover, both the domestic context, on the one hand, and the international stimuli and facilitating conditions, on the other, were very different in the second half of the 1980s from the first half of the 1970s.¹⁰ The Iberian changes of the 1970s did have an impact on Latin America, where there were not only ties of language and culture but also a regional great power, the United States, supportive (especially during the Carter administration) of democratization. In contrast, in Eastern Europe there was a profound lack of political change during the 1970s in the regional hegemon, the Soviet Union, and intense distrust on the part of the Brezhnev leadership of even liberalization, never mind democratization.

It is, of course, the case that those who speak about a Third Wave of democratization that embraces also the cases of former Communist countries do not necessarily suggest that they are all interconnected. What needs emphasis, however, is that there *are* strong interconnections among the transitions from Communism that constitute a *Fourth Wave* of democratization. ('Democratization' is understood here as a *process* which may be incomplete and does not exclude the possibility of backsliding.) These transitions share a common stimulus and common facilitating condition. One cannot make a clear distinction in terms of *time* between the Third Wave of democratization and the Fourth, for the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines ended in 1986, and there was progress

¹⁰ For a spirited debate on some of these issues, see Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?" *Slavic Review*, vol. 53, n. 1, Spring 1994, 173-85; Valerie Bunce, "Should Transitologists Be Grounded?" op. cit. n. 4; Karl and Schmitter, "From an Iron Curtain to a Paper Curtain: Grounding Transitologists or Students of Postcommunism?" *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, n. 4, Winter 1994, 965-78; and Bunce, "Paper Curtains and Paper Tigers," *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, n. 4, 979-87.

towards democratization in South Korea and Taiwan between 1986 and 1988.¹¹ This overlapped in time with the transformation that had got underway in the Soviet Union, but those Soviet changes would not appear to have been of particular importance in relation to the liberalization and partial democratization of conservative authoritarian regimes in Asia. What happened in Moscow was, in contrast, of such decisive importance for the transition from Communism in Europe—and so interconnected are all those transitions—that it makes sense to see them as representing a discrete political phenomenon. If the notion of waves means anything more than a temporal bunching, and it is of limited use if that is *all* it means, then the changes in East and East-Central Europe constitute a Fourth Wave of democratization.¹²

¹¹ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, op. cit. n. 9, 23.

¹² South Africa should also be seen as belonging to the Fourth, rather than Third, Wave of democratization. The changes in Moscow and the collapse of Communism in East-Central Europe had a decisive impact both on the African National Congress and, still more, on the ruling National Party, led by F.W. de Klerk. Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev was clearly oriented toward political settlements rather than armed struggle and Moscow had no interest in fomenting revolutionary violence and unrest in Africa or Asia. The fundamental shifts in both the domestic and foreign policy of the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s strengthened the forces of moderation within the ANC, while the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 made the Marxist-Leninist rhetoric of many of its leading figures appear outmoded. On the other side, de Klerk's genuine fears of Communist encroachment into South Africa, with the ANC as its vehicle, were stilled by the end of the Cold War and Soviet nonintervention when one East European country after another ceased to be a Communist state. Moreover, the ending of the Cold War removed the solitary shred of legitimation (holding Communism at bay) that a pragmatic conservative politician such as de Klerk could offer in justification of the banning of the ANC and the African Communist Party. As Adrian Guelke has noted, "the National Party government" had become "increasingly reliant on anti-communism to justify its policies internationally, particularly as any residual sympathy for racial oligarchy in the Western world faded" ("The Impact of the End of the Cold War on the South African Transition," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 14, n. 1, 1996, 87-100, at 97). But anti-Communism required some semblance of a plausible Communist threat if it was to carry any weight. After 1989 that

At a relatively late stage of the transition some of the incentives for East European countries became similar to those that applied to Spain and Portugal—in particular membership of the European Union and, to a much lesser extent, NATO. It would be stretching credulity, however, to argue that either aspiration was seen as a practical possibility in East-Central Europe as comparatively recently as 1985 when Gorbachev succeeded Konstantin Chernenko as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. Yet it is important that Western Europe offered a more attractive alternative to Communism over a generation later than it had done in the immediate postwar years, though even then Communist systems had to be imposed in Eastern Europe by Soviet force of arms (with the exceptions of Albania and Yugoslavia and the partial exception of Czechoslovakia). Once transition was seriously underway, then for democratic reformers both within southern and East-Central Europe, the European Union was a pole of attraction. For some, but not other, regimes emerging from authoritarian or specifically Communist rule, NATO membership was also seen as a goal worth pursuing. These international organizations attempt to uphold the principle of democracy as a condition of membership and the European Union also insists on the member states being part of a regulated market economy. Accordingly, once the transition was in progress, the prospect of membership of the EU, in particular, provided incentives for the establishment of democratic institutions and practices, first in southern and later in Eastern Europe. In the case of the East Europeans it also strengthened the hand of those who pushed for a speedy

conviction could not be sustained and it was no accident of timing that on 2 February 1990 de Klerk announced the lifting of the ban on the ANC and on the South African Communist Party, followed by the dramatic news of the imminent release of Nelson Mandela after twenty-seven years of imprisonment. On the relevance of the Soviet and East European changes for South Africa, see—in addition to Guelke's useful article—a valuable analysis by David Welsh and Jack Spence, "F.W. de Klerk: Enlightened Conservative," in Martin Westlake (ed.), *Leaders of Transition* (Macmillan, London, 2000), 29–52.

marketization of the economy. That was not an issue in Spain or Portugal where an essentially market economy already existed.

A specific feature of the transitions of the Fourth Wave is the by now well-accepted point that the dismantling of Communist regimes involved the special difficulty of simultaneously transforming the political system and the economic system. That is not, however, to say that students of transitions from Communism cannot gain insights from the comparative transitological literature, based disproportionately though it is on cases drawn from Latin America and southern Europe.¹³ Apart from the work of O'Donnell¹⁴ and Whitehead,¹⁵ Schmitter¹⁶ and Di Palma,¹⁷ the important books embracing both Eastern Europe and Latin America by Przeworski and by Linz and Stepan (the latter taking in southern Europe as well) are striking testimony to the contrary.¹⁸ It is worth noting,

¹³ Though for a forcefully argued contrary view, see Stephen F. Cohen, "Russian Studies without Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 15, n. 1, 1999, 37–55.

¹⁴ Besides his best-known work with Schmitter and Whitehead (cited below), see "On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries," *World Development*, vol. 21, n. 8, 1993, 1355–69; and "Illusions about Consolidation" in Larry Diamond et al., *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1997), 40–57.

¹⁵ See below.

¹⁶ See, for example, Schmitter's "The Influence of the International Context upon the Choice of National Institutions and Policies in Neo-Democracies" in Laurence Whitehead (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996), 26–54.

¹⁷ Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990).

¹⁸ Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1991); Przeworski, *Sustainable Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995); and Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems*

however, that in much of the literature on democratic transitions transnational influences were accorded very little attention until the changes in Eastern Europe brought them more sharply into focus. In the studies that concentrate specifically on southern Europe and Latin America, Laurence Whitehead was an early and rare exception to that general rule with his chapter on “International Aspects of Democratization” in the four-volume *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* edited by O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead in 1986.¹⁹ Ten years after his first substantial essay on the subject, Whitehead returned to the theme of *The International Dimensions of Democratization* in his edited book of that title.²⁰ In contrast to Huntington, as well as to Schmitter and Karl, he, too, sees the process of democratization in Eastern Europe as a ‘fourth wave’, though he does not elaborate the point.²¹

of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996).

¹⁹ See Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead (eds), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1986), 3–46.

²⁰ Laurence Whitehead (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas* (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1996). This includes a useful chapter by Whitehead entitled “Democracy and Decolonization: East-Central Europe,” 356–91. See also Geoffrey Pridham, Eric Herring, and George Sanford (eds), *Building Democracy? The International Dimension of Democratisation in Eastern Europe* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, rev. ed., 1997).

²¹ “Three International Dimensions of Democratization” in Whitehead, *ibid.*, 3–25, at 4. The first wave was that of countries—beginning with the USA—whose democratic institutions developed in the process of decolonization from the British Empire; the second was that of states whose political freedoms stemmed from the Allied Victory in the Second World War; and the third was that of the countries that underwent transition from conservative authoritarian rule in the period between 1973 and the (fourth wave) fall of Communism in Europe. (The ‘three international dimensions’ of Whitehead’s title are ‘contagion’, ‘control’, and ‘consent’.)

It surely makes sense to classify the transitions from Communism in Europe (though hardly those in Asia) as constituting a *fourth wave* of democratization. *First*, as already noted, the democratization of conservative authoritarian regimes did not act as a trigger to democratization in Communist Europe. These regimes did not in the 1970s or 1980s constitute a major reference group for either elites or citizenry in East European countries. *Second*, there is the simultaneity problem. The fact that both the command economy and the command polity had to be dismantled together and rebuilt on quite different foundations (producing a sharp contradiction, not least in the Soviet Union, between making the economic system work better and dismantling that system) made the transitions from authoritarian rule more complex and difficult in Russia and Eastern Europe than in Spain and Portugal. *Third*, the countries of Eastern Europe constituted an interconnected whole. Even though Albania and Yugoslavia were no longer part of a *Soviet* bloc, in the sense that they were not members of the Warsaw Pact, they possessed (in their very different ways) most of the attributes of Communist systems, Albania, of course, more than Yugoslavia. None of the East European Communist states—given their common ideological and sociopolitical foundations—could avoid being affected by what was happening in neighboring Communist countries. *Fourth*, and of fundamental importance, the changes in the Soviet Union were decisive for this Fourth Wave. As the regional hegemon, the Soviet Union had determined the parameters within which political change could occur throughout Eastern Europe. The pluralization of the Soviet political system and the new, conciliatory foreign policy its leaders pursued after 1985 changed the entire context in which political developments occurred in the region.²²

Whitehead, accordingly, is almost right when he identifies the trigger for this latest group of transitions from authoritarian rule as ‘the collapse of Soviet power’.²³ The *changes*

²² On this, see also Bunce, *Subversive Institutions*, op. cit. n. 6, 66-76.

²³ Whitehead, “Three International Dimensions,” op. cit. n. 21, 4.

in the Soviet Union did, indeed, constitute the essential facilitating condition and the most decisive impulse to democratization in Eastern Europe. But that is not to agree that it was Soviet *collapse* that played such a role. There were two crucial changes in Russia that directly stimulated and made possible the dramatic events of 1989. First, there was the demonstration effect of liberalizing and pluralizing change within the Soviet political system itself. Second, but no less crucial, there was the change of Soviet foreign policy whereby it was in the mid-1980s decided, and by 1988 publicly communicated, that there would be no more military interventions by Soviet troops to uphold regimes in East-Central Europe that could not command the support of their own people.²⁴ The ‘collapse of Soviet power’²⁵ was, in *part*, a *consequence* of the rapidity with which Communist regimes were removed in Eastern Europe, *not* an *antecedent* of this. There are a number of inter-related and profoundly important political events that need to be kept analytically distinct. They are: the transformation of the Soviet system, the transition from Communism in Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War, and the breakup not only of the Soviet Union but of the two other Communist states with federal institutions, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.²⁶

²⁴ For the evidence on this second point, see Anatoliy Chernyaev, *Shest’ let s Gorbachevym* (Kul’tura, Moscow, 1993); Vadim Medvedev, *Raspad* (Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, Moscow, 1994); Georgiy Shakhnazarov, *Tsena svobody* (Rossika Zevs, Moscow, 1993); Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, op. cit. n. 5, esp. ch. 7; Jacques Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997); and Neil Malcolm (ed.), *Russia and Europe: An End to Confrontation* (Pinter, for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1994).

²⁵ Whitehead, op. cit. n. 21, 4.

²⁶ Clearly, institutional path-determinacy had an important part to play in these outcomes. For discussion of this, see Bunce, op. cit. n. 6, *Subversive Institutions*, chapters 5 and 6, and Alfred Stepan’s paper, “Comparative Perspectives on Russian Federalism,” delivered in the panel on “Post-Communism and Comparative Politics” at the 31st National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, St. Louis, 18–21 November 1999.

Some waves of democratization can largely be explained by a single event. That is surely true of the restoration (or, in the case of Japan, establishment) of democratic institutions that followed the allied victory in World War Two. In the case of the transformation of Communist systems between 1988 and 1990, the changes in the Soviet Union are overwhelmingly the most important part of the explanation, although certainly not the whole story. These changes in Russia, in particular, require more analysis and explanation than the demise of Communism in East-Central Europe, since East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and even Hungary and Poland were penetrated political systems with very limited national autonomy, albeit varying considerably in the degree to which national elites or citizens pressed to those limits and sometimes succeeded in widening them. In all of these countries Communist systems represented an alien imposition, although this was less clear-cut in the case of the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia than in that of the other countries of the region until the Soviet armed intervention of August 1968.²⁷ It was predictable, therefore, that *liberalization* in the Soviet Union would have a profound and disproportionate impact on Eastern Europe and that *democratization* in Russia would lead to a still speedier democratization in the countries of East-Central Europe, in particular. Even when the international environment had been extremely unfavorable, democratic upsurges had occurred in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. These, of course, met with Soviet invasion in the first two cases and the threat of Soviet intervention in the last—during the rise of Solidarity, 1980–81.²⁸

²⁷ See H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1976); and Archie Brown and Gordon Wightman, "Czechoslovakia: Revival and Retreat," in Archie Brown and Jack Gray (eds), *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States* (Macmillan, London, 1977), 159–96.

²⁸ Intense pressure was put on the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party by the Soviet Politburo to introduce martial law with a strong indication that if the Poles did not do it, Soviet troops would. For an interesting account that draws upon Soviet archival sources (including Politburo minutes), see Carl

Jeanne Kirkpatrick, in her well-known article in *Commentary*, “Dictatorship and Double Standards,” published in 1979, observed that “the history of this century provides no grounds for expecting that radical totalitarian regimes will transform themselves.”²⁹ But the Hungarian revolution had come close to transforming Hungary in 1956; the ‘Prague Spring’, the culmination of a reform movement that emerged from within the Communist Party, was rapidly pluralizing the Czech polity; and Kirkpatrick was writing on the very eve of the emergence of Solidarity as a massive social movement. In other words, it should have been clear even then (and to some of us it was) that if you were (a) to identify all Communist systems as totalitarian and (b) to say that totalitarian states could not be radically altered from within, then at least one of those propositions had to be wrong.³⁰ Either these countries were not totalitarian or the generalization about totalitarian regimes was misleading. Fundamental change *had*, in fact, taken place within those societies—both from above and below—and it was Soviet intervention, or the threat of intervention in the case of Poland, that put a stop to it. It could have been argued, of course, and frequently

Bernstein and Marco Politi, *His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time* (Doubleday, New York, 1996), esp. 237–86. Even a senior official in the International Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party who was opposed to the use of force in Poland could not rule out a decision to resort to it on the part of the top Soviet leadership. Among those urging upon Leonid Brezhnev armed intervention in Poland was the Czechoslovak Communist leader, Gustáv Husák, whose own rise to power had been facilitated by the Soviet invasion of his country in 1968. See the memoirs of A.S. Chernyaev, *Moya zhizn' i moye vremya* (Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, Moscow, 1995), 410–13.

²⁹ *Commentary*, November 1979, 34–45, at 44.

³⁰ I made these points at the time—in my Henry L. Stimson Lectures, “Political Change in Communist Systems,” at Yale University in the Fall of 1980. For a recent analysis with a bearing on this issue, see Jack Hayward, Brian Barry, and Archie Brown (eds.), *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century* (The British Academy in association with Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999), chapter by Brown, “The Study of Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism,” 345–94, esp. 354–60.

was, that there could be no possibility of change in the Soviet Union, but that, too, turned out to be wrong.³¹

Reference Groups

In emphasizing the decisive importance of change in Moscow, one should not ignore other highly significant transnational influences. The exact weight of each cannot be measured, especially in retrospect, but varied from one country to another. For most of the nations there was the alternative source of information that emanated from contact with their diasporas, less restricted in the case of Poland and Hungary, more restricted (especially after 1968) in Czechoslovakia. There was widespread listening to foreign radio, particularly Radio Free Europe, resulting in the influence, even idealization, of the United States. There was also the increasing prosperity of East-Central Europe's 'near abroad'—the European Community (now European Union)—which was made manifest in the growing numbers of well-heeled tourists who arrived from the countries of the EU, especially the Federal Republic of Germany. The contrast between the two halves of Europe was far more familiar to the citizens of Poland than to those of Albania but, in general, was becoming better known throughout the eastern part of the continent.

It is difficult to compare East and Central Europeans' perceptions of the outside world over time—across the postwar decades—because in some countries there was no

³¹ The Soviet Union's imperviousness to change was almost an article of faith within the North Atlantic political establishment. At a conference of foreign policy-makers, influentials, and analysts from both sides of the Atlantic in which I participated in *February 1985*, there were only two participants (Jerry Hough and myself) who challenged the consensus and said that under Gorbachev, who, we confidently predicted, would soon be Soviet leader, important change would follow (though, admittedly, it went further and faster than even Hough and I, whose views later diverged, could claim to have expected). Nevertheless, the Chair of the final session of the conference, a former British Ambassador, summing up the proceedings, said (to nods of general approval): "There's one thing we all know. The Soviet Union isn't going to change."

survey research until just before or just after the fall of Communism. In others, where such studies were conducted earlier, there was, nevertheless, little serious research on public opinion until the 1970s and 1980s and, even then, variations in the extent to which the most sensitive political questions could be asked and, if posed, answered honestly. But the image of Western Europe could not *but* be better in the 1980s than it had been in the 1950s or even the 1960s. That was especially true of its leading economic power, West Germany, as memories of the war faded and it became increasingly clear that this was a different Germany from that which had been the cause of so much suffering in the continent. The Chancellorship of Willy Brandt—in combination with Brandt’s anti-Nazi wartime record—played an important part in changing perceptions.

All that notwithstanding, however, it is highly probable that the countries of Eastern Europe would have rapidly ceased to be Communist in *any* decade from the 1950s onwards had their peoples not accurately perceived that behind their own national rulers stood the might of the Soviet army and a Soviet leadership ready to use whatever level of coercion might be necessary to uphold a pro-Soviet Communist regime in countries that it viewed as the main fruits of victory in the Second World War. The transition *to* Communism had owed more to the Soviet army than to domestic revolutionaries except, as noted earlier, in Yugoslavia and Albania. In Albania’s case Yugoslav help was more important than that of the Soviet Union. Czechoslovakia was an ambiguous and intermediate case. There were no Soviet troops on Czech soil when the Communist Party seized full power there in 1948, but since the end of the war Stalin had regarded Czechoslovakia as being within the Soviet sphere of influence, and Czech politicians on both sides of the political divide felt the pressures from Moscow.

In the transition *from* Communism much depended on what a particular nation’s or group of nations’ reference group was. Thus, for example, the Czechs liked to compare themselves with Austria. The most orthodox Communists apart, they never failed to remind Western visitors to Communist Czechoslovakia that between the wars they had

been every bit as prosperous as Austria, whereas once they were locked into the Soviet bloc and a Communist system, the Austrians had left them far behind.³² In the Soviet Union the reference group for the three Baltic states was their Scandinavian neighbors. It is hardly surprising that this accentuated dissatisfaction with their Soviet lot. That those Scandinavian countries had far greater freedom, greater wealth, **and** much superior welfare states to the Soviet one was all too evident.

Once democratization processes got seriously underway in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s transnational influences became still more directly effective. The Communist regimes were never entirely able to stop ideas crossing national boundaries, and by the late 1980s they were totally *incapable* of preventing detailed information from being made available by radio and even television of events in neighboring countries they would rather their populations did not know about. News from a more distant country could, in principle, affect people's beliefs about what was *politically desirable*, but it was news of what was happening in neighboring countries that convinced them of what was *politically possible*. To some extent, one could say that this was what Whitehead calls 'contagion by proximity', although, arguably, that may better explain Spain following fast on the heels of Portugal than the changes of East-Central Europe, to which the failure of democratization in Yugoslavia (as Whitehead himself notes) stands out in the Fourth Wave. Philippe Schmitter observes that "Eastern Europe may provide the best possible case for contagion," but he also makes the crucial qualification that this was "even though the initial impetus for regime change was given by an exogenous event, i.e., the shift in Soviet foreign and defence policy vis-à-vis the region."³³

³² I made five study visits to Czechoslovakia when it was still a Communist state—in 1965, 1968, 1969, 1976, and 1983—and heard the comparison with Austria from a wide variety of people every time.

³³ Schmitter, "The Influence of the International Context," *op. cit.* n. 16, 40.

Liberalization and Democratization

All serious writers on transitions from authoritarian rule make a distinction between liberalization and democratization. This is undoubtedly relevant in analysis of the transition from Communism, even if in some cases the two processes were so compressed as to be almost simultaneous. But well before the late 1980s liberalization in one European Communist state could have an influence elsewhere. The special and overwhelmingly most important case is, once again, the Soviet Union. It is enough to recall the impact in East-Central Europe—above all in Poland and Hungary—of the Twentieth Party Congress in Moscow in 1956 and Nikita Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’. But there were intellectual and reformist influences from one East-Central European country to another. I clearly recall seeing prominently displayed in Prague shop windows in 1965 the works of the Polish economic reformer, Włodzimierz Brus (years later to become an Oxford colleague), whose writings had been translated from Polish into Czech. He was among the important influences on Ota Šik and the Czech economic reformers. Later the current of influence went into reverse. The crushing of the ‘Prague Spring’, following the Soviet invasion of August 1968, reinforced conservative Communists throughout Eastern Europe, even in Poland. (Brus was among the leading Polish intellectuals who emigrated at the end of the 1960s or beginning of the 1970s, in Brus’s case in 1972 to Britain.)

What, however, occurred in Eastern Europe up until the changes in the Soviet Union that began in 1985-86 and became much more profound in 1987-88 was, at best, pockets of liberalization, not democratization. Thus, it is impossible to agree with those who see Pope John Paul II as the great democratizer of Eastern Europe, although the Catholic Church was the strongest independent institution in several Communist countries, most obviously in Poland. Huntington quotes with approval Timothy Garton Ash writing that the Pope’s “first great pilgrimage” to Poland was the “beginning of the end” of

Communism in Eastern Europe.³⁴ But *post hoc* does not mean *ergo propter hoc*. One could, with perhaps greater plausibility, say that Khrushchev's 1956 'Secret Speech' was the beginning of the end of Communism in Eastern Europe, but that end was a long time in coming.

Certainly the election of a Polish Pope in 1978 was far from good news for the Polish Communist leadership. When Stanislaw Kania telephoned Gierek to break the bad tidings, the response of the first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party was to exclaim: "Holy Mother of God!"³⁵ Even at the time it was clear that having a fellow-countryman in the Vatican—a man who as a Bishop and Cardinal had stood up to the Communist authorities and who became the first non-Italian Pope for four-and-a-half centuries—had galvanized the Polish opposition and given them a sense that God was on their side. It surely played a significant part in the rise of Solidarity. But Solidarity, while it was an admired example in much of Eastern Europe, was not one that was followed anywhere. Moreover, its success, before the imposition of martial law in December 1981, was relatively short-lived—until, that is, the changes in the Soviet Union much later in the decade created a political climate in which, between 1988 and 1990, it could re-emerge victorious. Solidarity worried the Soviet Politburo intensely even in its first phase,³⁶ but that did not lead them to liberalize, still less democratize. Quite the reverse. At best it sent a very ambiguous message to the Soviet Union. For some of the more enlightened party intellectuals in research institutes in Moscow and the more thoughtful members of the Central Committee apparatus it was a useful lesson that the working class could be in the vanguard not of society's triumphal progress on the path to Communism but in the rejection of Communism. It could be interpreted as reinforcing the need to avoid too

³⁴ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, op. cit. n. 9, 83.

³⁵ Bernstein and Politi, *His Holiness*, op. cit. n. 28, 175.

³⁶ Bernstein and Politi, *His Holiness*, 247-57; and Chernyaev, op. cit. n. 28, *Moya zhizn' i moye vremya*, 410-13.

excessive and visible inequalities in society but also as emphasizing the necessity of stamping hard on dissident groups before they got out of hand. As a matter of historical fact, the crackdown on the Soviet dissident movement was especially harsh post-1979 and up to, and including, Chernenko's thirteen months as General Secretary. The leading Western specialist on Soviet dissent, Peter Reddaway, referred at the end of 1983 to the "post-1979 purge of dissent" and, at the same time, acknowledged that "the dissenting groups and movements...have made little or no headway among the mass of ordinary people in the Russian heartland."³⁷

The Pope unquestionably made a huge impact on Polish society and politics and helped to put the party-state authorities on the defensive. To the extent that he helped to inspire the Polish opposition in 1979, 1980, and 1981, he had an impact, too, on the Soviet Politburo as they set up a commission on Poland and pressed the leadership of the PUWP to take a firmer stand against the growing pluralization of Polish politics. If Huntington is right, the Pope also played a part in the democratization of Brazil, the Philippines, Argentina, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Haiti, Korea, Chile, and Paraguay with his visits to those countries.³⁸ That is quite an impressive list and, in terms of impact, one could easily add Lithuania. But there again democratization did not follow an election in Rome or events in Poland but radical change in Moscow.

Once the sequence of democratization in Eastern Europe was underway, the transnational influences in the form of demonstration effects were obvious. If the Poles and Hungarians could get away with it (with Communist rulers and Opposition leaders agreeing on new democratic rules of the game in the course of Roundtable discussions in the Spring and Summer of 1989), why, thought the Czechs and East Germans, the Romanians and

³⁷ Peter Reddaway, "Dissent in the Soviet Union," *Problems of Communism*, vol. 32, n. 6, November-December 1983, 1-15.

³⁸ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, op. cit. n. 9, 82-85.

Bulgarians, should not they. In November and December of the same year, in a variety of ways (but violently only in Romania) they did.³⁹ And once Moscow had conceded the independence of ‘the outer empire’, it gave added confidence to the citizens of the most restive parts of the ‘inner empire’ in the Baltic states, ever more boldly from 1989, to press the case for *their* independence. One of the most important examples of demonstration effects—and, in this case, *literally*, the effect of *demonstrations*—was the impact that the massive and public rejection of Communist rule in Eastern Europe had on the attitudes to the Communist Party of *Russians*. While a lot of information on the misdeeds of their Soviet rulers was being published in the USSR, especially from 1986–87 onwards, Russians came much later than most East Europeans to associate their misfortunes specifically with the rule of the Communist Party.

As late as December 1989, according to a large-scale poll conducted by VTsIOM,⁴⁰ a majority of Russians held Lenin to be by far the greatest person who had ever lived.⁴¹ However, between March and August 1989 there was a sharp fall in the proportion of the Soviet population who expressed ‘full trust’ in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union—from just under 40 per cent to a little over 20 per cent.⁴² There were certainly major domestic factors involved in this, among them the televised broadcasts of the sessions of the new Soviet legislature—the Congress of People’s Deputies—which broke new ground with their airing of public criticism of Communist Party leaders and policies. But the culmination of the changes in Eastern Europe in November–December 1989 coincided

³⁹ See Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989*, op. cit. n. 24; Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (Random House, New York, 1990); and Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1990).

⁴⁰ The most professional body investigating public opinion at that time—then the All-Union (now the All-Russian) Institute for the Study of Public Opinion.

⁴¹ V.V. Dubin et al., *Obshchestvennoe mnenie v tsifrah*, n. 2/9 (VTsIOM, Moscow, 1990).

⁴² Matthew Wyman, *Public Opinion in Postcommunist Russia* (Macmillan, London, 1997), 63.

with a sharp rise in the number of Soviet respondents who said they had ‘no trust’ in the Communist Party. The percentage of citizens in that category almost doubled (to just under 40 per cent) between December 1989 and March 1990.⁴³ For a majority of the population the ‘leading role’ of the Communist Party had simply been taken for granted until almost the end of the 1980s. There was hardly anyone alive who could remember anything else and while people were far from satisfied with their lot, there had been no mass movement from below to change the fundamentals of the system. What Soviet citizens saw, however, on their own television screens—as a result of *glasnost*—of the massive demonstrations against Communist rulers and the Communist system in Prague, Bucharest, and several cities of East Germany helped to give a much more radically anti-Communist character to their dissatisfaction.

Western Influences

Once a wave of democratization had begun in Communist Europe, the importance of contagion, proximity, and demonstration effects is fairly clear. But, as Whitehead says of the contagion hypothesis, it “cannot tell us how a sequence begins, why it ends, what it excludes, or even the order in which it is likely to advance.”⁴⁴ And, of course, correlation, as always, must be separated from causation, for it may be “the policy of a third country that explains the spread of democracy from one country to the next.”⁴⁵ Many people in the United States, in East-Central Europe and some even in Russia would argue that the third country that should be credited with causing the democratization of Eastern Europe was *not* the Soviet Union at a certain, late phase of its history but the United States, thus addressing in one of its variants the question raised earlier in this paper of the impact of the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Whitehead, *The International Dimensions of Democratization*, op. cit. n. 20, 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

West on the Soviet Union. The influence and pressures of the US are not to be discounted, but writers such as Richard Pipes have exaggerated their causative, as distinct from facilitating, role in bringing about democratization in Eastern Europe.⁴⁶

Ronald Reagan's approval of a sharp increase in military expenditure, including the resources poured into the Strategic Defense Initiative, did not lead the Politburo to elect a 'soft-liner', as Pipes has suggested.⁴⁷ Indeed, with the strong support of Defense Minister Ustinov and Foreign Minister Gromyko, who were thereby able to continue unimpeded *their* hard line, the Politburo chose Konstantin Chernenko to be General Secretary on the death of Andropov in the second of three successions to the party leadership in as many years but the first to follow the launching of the SDI program. When Gorbachev became General Secretary just thirteen months later, this owed nothing to his having indicated that he would pursue a more conciliatory foreign policy, for that was not an issue in the Politburo discussions, and Gorbachev had not hitherto deviated from the official Soviet line on international and security issues.⁴⁸ (The rules of the game were such that, had he done so, even in the Politburo—not to speak of publicly—he would have had no chance of becoming General Secretary.)

During Reagan's first term as President international tension was acute and East European independence remote. According to Anatoliy Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador to the United States from 1962 to 1986 (and from 1986 to 1988 head of the International Department of the Central Committee), "the impact of Reagan's hard-line policy on the internal debates in the Kremlin and on the evolution of the Soviet leadership was exactly

⁴⁶ For elaboration of this point, see Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, op. cit. n. 5, 225-42 and 315-18.

⁴⁷ Richard Pipes, "Misinterpreting the Cold War: the Hard-liners Had It Right," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 74, n. 1, January-February 1995, 154-60, esp. 158.

⁴⁸ For the full transcript of the Politburo meeting that chose Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, see *Istochnik* (Moscow), 0/1, 1993, 68-75.

the opposite from the one intended by Washington.”⁴⁹ It was the changes introduced by Gorbachev in both domestic and foreign policy—‘new thinking’ followed by new behavior—that persuaded not only Margaret Thatcher but also Ronald Reagan that this was a leader they could ‘do business with’. Gorbachev was the fourth Soviet General Secretary to overlap with the Reagan presidency, and nothing changed for the better either in East-West relations or in the autonomy accorded Eastern Europe until he succeeded Chernenko. He then proceeded to create, very early on, a new foreign policy team, in which Aleksandr Yakovlev, Eduard Shevardnadze, Vadim Medvedev, Anatoliy Chernyaev, Georgiy Shakhnazarov, and Yevgeniy Primakov were among those who played the most significant parts. All owed their promotion to Gorbachev and several were surprise choices for the posts they were asked to fill.

This, of course, raises another extremely important source of transnational influence—the impact on these leading political actors of their experience of the West, a different aspect of Western impact on Soviet policy. There cannot, of course, be a simple equation between foreign travel and a more positive view of Western political and economic systems or of Western intentions. Gromyko, after all, had spent much time in Western countries and Shevardnadze scarcely any before he entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Shevardnadze, however, had by far the more open mind of the two and was undoubtedly influenced by his Western interlocutors after he moved from Tbilisi to Moscow and embarked on his travels as Foreign Minister. The most important example by far, though, of reassessment of former stereotypes as a result of foreign travel was that of Gorbachev. This occurred well before he became General Secretary, although he did not broadcast these views outside a trusted circle. Vadim Medvedev, Chernyaev, and Shakhnazarov have all reported Gorbachev saying to them at different times that it was his

⁴⁹ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)* (Random House, New York, 1996), 482.

trips to Western Europe that first made him realize how little in common much of Soviet propaganda concerning the West had with reality.⁵⁰

Gorbachev's earliest visit to a Western country was to Italy in 1971.⁵¹ It was followed in that decade with visits to Belgium, Holland, France (in 1976 and 1977), and the Federal Republic of Germany. In the first half of the 1980s Gorbachev paid visits that had a great impact on him: to Canada in 1983 (where he also had long and important conversations with the Soviet Ambassador, Aleksandr Nikolaevich Yakovlev), to Italy in the summer of 1984 (when he led the Soviet delegation to the funeral of the popular leader of the Italian Communist Party, the 'Eurocommunist' Enrico Berlinguer), and to Britain in December of that year (where he met and established a rapport with Margaret Thatcher). In his memoirs Gorbachev himself draws attention to the great importance to him of these foreign visits in a variety of ways: they filled gaps in his knowledge left by the paucity of reliable information about Western countries dispensed in the Soviet Union; they enabled him to discover, and be impressed by, the lack of hostility to Soviet citizens; he learned that in Western Europe people had a higher standard of living than in the Soviet Union and that, in turn, prompted him to ask the question 'why?'. Especially significantly, he writes in his memoirs that after he had seen a functioning civil society and the political systems of Western Europe, his "*a priori* faith in the advantages of socialist over bourgeois democracy was shaken."⁵²

⁵⁰ Chernyaev, Shakhnazarov, and Medvedev all independently mentioned this in interviews between 1991 and 1993 when I asked them what impact, if any, Gorbachev's visits to Western Europe in the 1970s had made on him.

⁵¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy* (Novosti, Moscow, 1995), vol. 1, 159. Chernyaev, who first met Gorbachev on a trip to Belgium and Holland in 1972, was mistaken in thinking that this had been Gorbachev's first time in the West: Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, op. cit. n. 24, 8.

⁵² Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy*, vol. 1, 169.

Learning from seeing was important also for key members of Gorbachev's entourage. Yakovlev's ten-year stint (1973-83) as Soviet Ambassador to Canada gave him unusual exposure to a Western country for a Soviet official who had been acting head of the Department of Propaganda of the Central Committee and who was to continue to be much concerned with ideological issues. Those who worked with him at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations in Moscow (IMEMO) during his time as its Director, 1983-85, mention how frequently, and positively, he referred to Canada (as distinct from the United States, of which he had remained critical after spending a year at Columbia University in 1959). Gorbachev's two most important aides, in policy advisory terms, Chernyaev and Shakhnazarov, were also frequent travelers to the West as well as, in Shakhnazarov's case (for he was a senior official in the Socialist Countries Department of the Central Committee) to Eastern Europe. Both were closet liberals or social democrats within the Central Committee apparatus.⁵³

Of course, there were many other changes in Communist societies apart from those induced by transnational influences. A focus on the transnational is to recognize its importance, not to favor uncausal explanation. One reason why the international dimension is so important is that, as David Stark and Laszlo Bruszt rightly observe, in Eastern Europe as a whole "with the exception of Poland, these were extraordinarily weak civil societies."⁵⁴ So far as the influence of the West is concerned, some of that had a direct impact on Establishment social scientists, for they, in contrast with non-Party members,

⁵³ Shakhnazarov told me (in an interview in the Kremlin on 16 December 1991) that since the early 1960s he had felt himself to be a social democrat and he emphasized the importance of seeing other countries for himself for the evolution of *his* views. There is ample scope for further research on that section of the Soviet political elite which backed Gorbachev's reforms and played an important supporting part in the break with previous Soviet foreign policy.

⁵⁴ David Stark and Laszlo Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East-Central Europe* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), 16.

had far better opportunities to travel to the West and to make personal contact with their Western counterparts. But until early 1989 the most crucial influence of the West, even for the East-Central European transition, was through its impact on key decision-makers in Moscow. The more favourable perceptions of Western policies and institutions by Gorbachev and his allies in the Soviet leadership and their determination to make radical changes in both foreign and domestic policy constituted the most important facilitating condition for what followed in Eastern Europe in 1989. Indeed, the program of reform that Gorbachev persuaded the Nineteenth Party Conference to accept in the summer of 1988 went beyond that of the 'Prague Spring' reformers of twenty years earlier. It thus provided not just a green light for but also a direct stimulus to reform in East-Central Europe. In Hungary, Stark and Bruszt observe, János Kádár liked to boast that "what Gorbachev is trying to do now, we already accomplished decades before," but he was replaced as Hungarian party leader in May 1988 by a coalition of opponents who were aware that "Hungary was actually lagging behind the Soviet Union in the field of political reform."⁵⁵

East-Central Europe: Self-Assertion and Contagion

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was even harder for Soviet leaders to come to terms with than the Prague Spring, for it had been a violent uprising and had involved the hanging of Communist secret policemen from lampposts. Thus, the most reformist member of the Hungarian Politburo, Imre Poszgay, caused a sensation when he announced in January 1989 that a commission he had headed examining "the events of 1956" had found that this had been a "popular insurrection against an oligarchical power." The head of the International Department of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee, Valentin Falin, immediately drafted a memorandum restating the Soviet position that this had been a counter-revolution. But, to the astonishment of those

⁵⁵ Stark and Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways*, 21.

Hungarians who waited with baited breath for Moscow's reaction, there **was** no reaction, for Falin's memorandum was never sent. Gorbachev refused to endorse it, invoking his policy of noninterference.⁵⁶ The Hungarian reassessment was in itself important beyond the borders of Hungary, but so was the Soviet response or, more precisely, nonresponse. A Hungarian decision that had even further reaching consequences was the opening of the border to Austria in late May 1989. This led to tens of thousands of East Germans using Hungary as a route to West Germany and put colossal pressure on the East German authorities. It was a decision that led by November of the same year to the opening of the Berlin Wall. While the Hungarian government had grounds for stating that they took their momentous decision independently, Jacques Lévesque, who has interviewed many of the principal political actors, adds two 'nuances' to that statement. Some days before the Hungarian decision was made public in May Foreign Minister Gyula Horn went on a secret visit to Bonn where he met Chancellor Helmut Kohl and extracted a promise of a loan of one billion DM in return for opening the border. He asked the Germans to allow a 'decent' delay after the doors were opened before announcing the credits.⁵⁷ The second, and even more important, 'nuance' is that the Hungarian Foreign Ministry also sent a note to Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze some days in advance of the announcement of opening the borders. The purpose was, according to Hungarian Deputy Foreign Minister Laszlo Kovacs, "to inform the USSR about the probable direction we were intending to take." The Soviet reaction was again to do nothing. Shevardnadze's terse reply said simply: "This is an affair that concerns Hungary, the GDR, and the FRG."⁵⁸ At this stage a Soviet hands-off policy was still a decisive element of transnational influence. By the end of the

⁵⁶ Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989*, op. cit. n. 24, 129-30. For Falin's own critical view of the conduct of Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev, see V.M. Falin, *Bez skidok na obstoyatel'stva: Politicheskie vospominaniya* (Respublika, Moscow, 1999), 380-458.

⁵⁷ Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989*, 153.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

year, the precedents that had built up were such that Soviet nonintervention was being taken for granted, so that from then on future Soviet (and Russian) influence over Eastern Europe was dramatically diminished. For over forty years both East European rulers and peoples had had to think about the likely reaction in Moscow to what they did. In the course of 1989 that changed irrevocably.

The closer East European states and Russia got to dismantling the Communist system, the more salient and direct became Western influences. No longer were they mediated by Gorbachev and like-minded colleagues who wished to preserve as much of a regional alliance and, especially, as much of the Soviet Union as could be kept together (on the basis of a new Union Treaty) without recourse to sustained coercion. Moreover, while that radically reformist wing of the Soviet leadership was in favor of a move to a regulated market economy (for which Gorbachev was much scorned by the more dogmatic free marketeers for his use of the word ‘regulated’), they hesitated to remove all controls before new political and economic institutions were functioning. By 1990–91 the Soviet Union was in crisis, and “the moments of greatest freedom,” Peter Gourevitch has suggested on the basis of comparative study of international economic crises, “are crisis points” (with choices “more constrained in stable times”).⁵⁹ For the radical opposition in Russia during 1990–91—not only to the old regime but to Gorbachev, by this time despised for ‘half-measures’—transnational influences were enormously important. Many activists in, and supporters of, the ‘Democratic Russia’ movement made an uncritical association among

⁵⁹ Peter Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times: Comparative Responses to International Economic Crises* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1986). See also, for a critique of Gourevitch’s and related work, Gabriel Almond, “Review Article: The International-National Connection,” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 19, n. 2, April 1989, 237–59.

the West, democracy, a market economy and greater prosperity.⁶⁰ Ronald Reagan and especially Margaret Thatcher (who emerged as the most admired living woman in the same December 1989 VTsIOM poll that found Lenin to be the greatest person who had *ever* lived) became popular in the last years of the Soviet Union. Boris Yel'tsin, enjoying the enthusiastic support of 'Democratic Russia', increasingly portrayed Gorbachev as only a very partially reconstructed Communist. Presenting himself as a truer democrat and better friend of the West, he resolutely moved into political space created by Gorbachev's pluralizing reforms. Yel'tsin's self-portrait was subsequently to prove highly misleading, but that is another story.⁶¹ The decisive steps in the transition from Communism had been taken by Gorbachev and he was the first and last Westernizer to be General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Conclusions

Transnational influences came directly from the West to Eastern Europe, partly through diasporas, partly through radio broadcasts aimed directly at the East European populations, partly through foreign travel in both directions. Of the many ways in which they came to the Soviet Union from the West, perhaps the most important—and least attended to—was the direct influence of Western interlocutors and Western travel on a new

⁶⁰ For an original and valuable analysis of the belief systems of those who called themselves 'democrats' in the last years of the Soviet Union, see Alexander Lukin, *The Political Culture of the Russian 'Democrats'* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000).

⁶¹ See, for example, Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality* (Carnegie Endowment, Washington, D.C., 1999); Eugene Huskey, *Presidential Power in Russia* (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, 1999); Dmitri Glinski and Peter Reddaway, "The Yeltsin Era in the Light of Russian History: Reform or Reaction?" *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 6, n. 3, 1998, 518-34; Stephen F. Cohen, "Russian Studies without Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 15, n. 1, 1999, 37-55; and Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998).

generation of Soviet policy-makers and, in particular, on Gorbachev. There was very definite influence from one Eastern European country to another, most spectacularly in the year of transformation, 1989, more subtly before that. Eastern Europe had an ambiguous impact on the Soviet Union. When, from the point of view of Soviet within-system reformers, East European reforms went too far and too fast, this could strengthen the hand of hard-liners within the Soviet Establishment and so hold up by years Soviet reforms. Thus, while the Prague Spring was welcomed (in private) by the more radical Russian reformers, closet reformers within the higher echelons of the Communist Party feared that it was going to result in a severe setback for them. When the Soviet military intervention in August 1968 to put an end to the Czech reforms took place, that was, indeed, a victory for conservative forces in Russia which saw them through the remainder of the Brezhnev era—another fourteen years—without disturbance.

Similarly, the rise of Solidarity did nothing to strengthen Soviet reformers but led to a more severe crackdown on Russian dissidents. In contrast, because Hungarian reform under Kádár was cautious and evolutionary, Russian economic reformers were able to draw upon the work of their Hungarian colleagues in their own writings, though it took two leadership changes for them to be listened to at the top of the party hierarchy. The process of listening began with Andropov, stopped under Chernenko, and began again—and accelerated—under Gorbachev. In 1989 what happened in Eastern Europe had a huge impact on the Soviet Union itself. East-Central European independence stimulated and emboldened demands for outright independence in a number of Soviet republics, especially the Baltic states, and also gave a more anti-Communist character to the growing opposition movement in Russia. It was, however, the changes in the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s that altered the entire political context in which East-Central and Eastern European peoples lived and politicians acted. *That* transnational influence was the decisive trigger and indispensable facilitator of transition from Communist rule and of the Fourth Wave of democratization—from Budapest and Berlin to the Baltics.