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ANALYSING BRITISH POLITICS

Developments in East European Politics

Edited by

**Stephen White
Judy Batt
Paul G. Lewis**

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Preface

It used to be easy to define 'Eastern Europe'. Broadly speaking, it was a group of states on the far side of what was for many years an Iron Curtain. Most of them bordered on the Soviet Union, and most of them were bound to the Soviet Union by economic and military alliances as well as by a close interconnection at the level of their communist party leaderships. Their fate, it appeared, had been largely determined at the end of the Second World War, when Europe had been divided – however provisionally – into rival spheres of influence. Yugoslavia had successfully separated itself from the Soviet alliance in the late 1940s, and from the 1960s Albania and Romania were increasingly independent. All of the states in the region none the less remained under communist leadership, state ownership was dominant, and public life was framed by the requirements of Marxism-Leninism.

The dramatic changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s have shattered these earlier patterns, and brought an end to the division of Europe and – in most parts of the region – to communist rule itself. The changes that began in 1989 took a variety of forms, and governments changed more quickly than political systems and forms of ownership, still less the habits and practices that had developed over forty years of communist rule – and in many cases over a much longer period. By the early 1990s, none the less, East European states were facing a largely similar set of challenges. Could they develop forms of rule, including party systems and structures of participation, that would replace the authoritarianism of the communist years? Could they find a balance between effective leadership, often through a presidency, and accountability, typically to an elected parliament? Could they reverse the economic decline of the late communist years, and could they best do so through 'shock therapy' or by a more gradual process? And could they carry out programmes of change with popular support, notwithstanding the sacrifices that were in-

volved and the increasingly difficult position of students, the elderly, the handicapped, and a growing number of unemployed?

These are just some of the issues that are addressed in this collection, which brings together a number of leading specialists from the European countries and from North America. Our first two chapters set out the context of change, and explore some of the features that mark out a distinctively East European group of systems. We turn, in the second part, to a series of chapters that consider the process of transition in a number of individual states in the region: in Poland, the Czech and Slovak republics, Hungary, Bulgaria, and what has become known as the 'former Yugoslavia'. Our third part deals more comparatively with processes of change, including parties and parliaments, leaderships and the mass public, and the difficult transition from central planning to the market and a greater degree of social differentiation. Our fourth and final section examines the comparative politics of the region in a postcommunist era, and the place of Eastern Europe in a broader international environment; and we conclude with the voices of East Europeans themselves as they contemplate an uncertain future.

Developments in East European Politics is intended as a guide to the common patterns, as well as the individual variety, among a group of states that were formerly modelled on the Soviet Union but are now a distinctive and independent presence in a postcommunist international system. We hope that not only our students, but also our colleagues and readers in other walks of life, will find something of value in the result.

Stephen White

Judy Batt

Paul G. Lewis

Note: in the interests of reader-friendliness, accents and diacriticals have been omitted from Eastern European names.

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Daniel N. Nelson is Director of the Graduate Programs in International Studies at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. During 1990–1 he was Senior Foreign and Defense Policy Advisor for the Majority Leader of the US House of Representatives, Richard Gephardt, and he was previously a Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment and a Professor of Political Science at the University of Kentucky. His most recent books are *Romania after Tyranny* (1992) and *Security after Hegemony* (1993).

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Nigel Swain is Deputy Director of the Centre for Central and Eastern European Studies at the University of Liverpool. His publications include *Hungary: A Decade of Economic Reform* (with Paul Hare and Hugo Radice, 1981), *Collective Farms which Work?* (1985), *Hungary: The Rise and Fall of Feasible Socialism* (1992) and *Eastern Europe since 1945* (with Geoffrey Swain, 1993). He is currently researching the impact on rural society of the transition to private agriculture in Central Europe.

Ray Taras teaches politics at Tulane University in New Orleans. He studied at the universities of Montreal, Sussex and Essex, and at the University of Warsaw in Poland, and has taught at US universities since 1982. The author of *Ideology in a Socialist State: Poland 1956–1983* (1983) and *Poland: Socialist State, Rebellious Nation* (1986), Ray Taras has also edited *Leadership Change in Communist States* (1990) and *Handbook of Political Science Research on the USSR and Eastern Europe* (1992).

Stephen White is Professor of Politics and a Member of the Institute of Russian and East European Studies at the University of Glasgow. A specialist on Soviet, Russian and comparative politics, his books include *The Origins of Detente* (1985), *The Bolshevik Poster* (1988), *Communist Political Systems: An Introduction* (3rd edn, 1990) and *After Gorbachev* (4th edn, 1993). He is presently working on a survey-based project on democratic values in Russia, Ukraine, Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia.

Gordon Wightman is Lecturer in the School of Politics and Communication Studies at the University of Liverpool. His articles on Czechoslovak politics have appeared in *Electoral Studies*, *Parliamentary Affairs* and the *Journal of Communist Studies*, and in professional symposia. He is presently engaged in an inter-university research project on 'Regime change in East-Central Europe', sponsored by the UK Economic and Social Research Council under its East–West Initiative.

Map of Eastern Europe