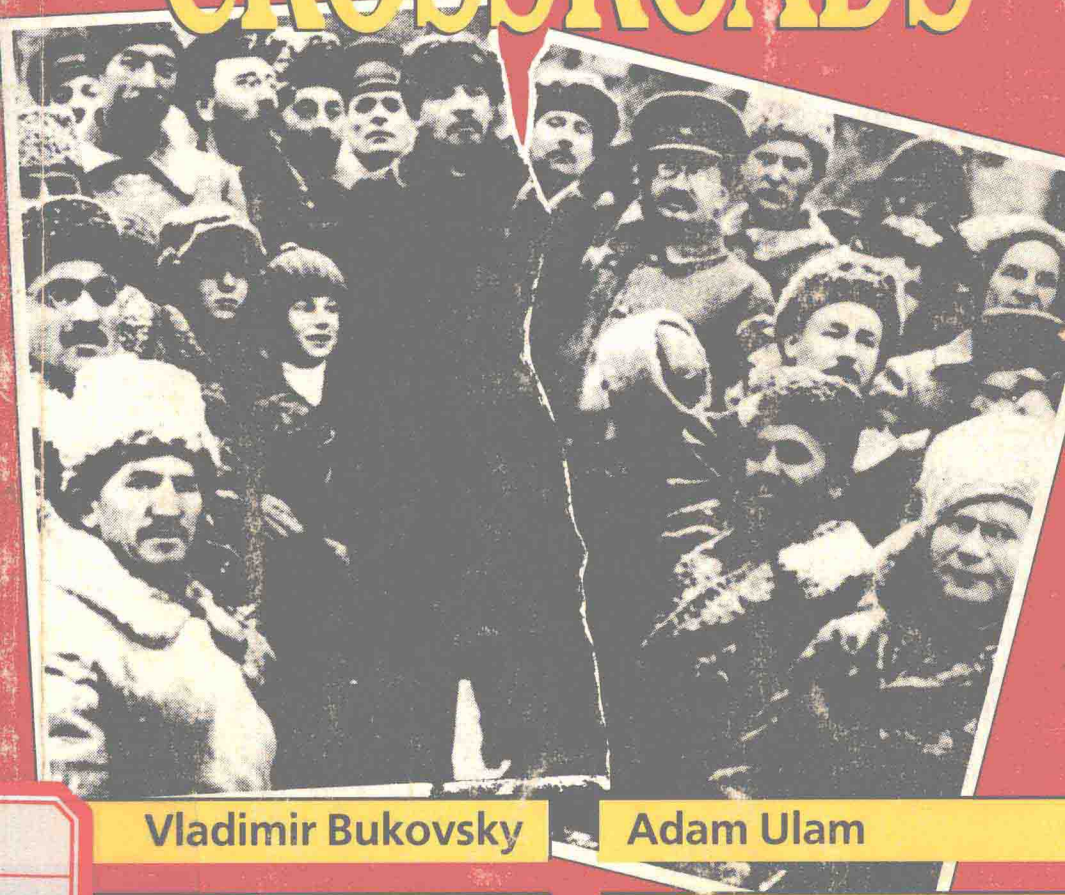
TOTALITARIANISM AT THE CROSSROADS



Vladimir Bukovsky | Adam Ulam

John Gray | Roger Scruton

Andrzej Walicki | Zbigniew Rau

ed. and with an introduction, by Ellen Frankel P

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Ellen Frankel Paul

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TOTALITARIANISM AT THE CROSSROADS

To the revolutionaries of Eastern Europe

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Introduction

Not long ago we were at a crossroads—where was the world going; toward further confrontation, the aggravation of ideological hostility, the whipping up of military threats, or toward cooperation, mutual understanding and the search for agreement? The choice has more or less taken place. And now the challenge is to quietly and thoroughly move toward a new, peaceful period.

Mikhail S. Gorbachev,
November 14, 1989

The twentieth century's remaining totalitarian experiments—all of Marxist genesis—are in deep crisis. Marxist totalitarianism, wherever it seized power, demonstrated a fundamental antipathy toward liberty, attempting to eradicate every vestige of political, economic, religious, and civil liberty that formerly existed among its subjects. With the apparent unwillingness of the Soviet Union to preserve socialism in its satellites with tanks, the antipathy of the colonized towards the imposed, ideological state has erupted with remarkable zeal and apparent spontaneity in one Eastern European satrapy after another. For the first time, nations are seemingly overcoming totalitarianism from within.

Change in Eastern Europe is proceeding at a dizzying pace. What seemed impossible yesterday is tomorrow's old news. Nearly a decade separated Solidarity's formation in the Gdansk shipyards from the ascension of the first non-Communist prime minister since the Communists secured power. The Hungarian Communists' removal of the old guard, transformation into a socialist party promising free elections, and failure in a plebiscite to dictate the conditions of the first election took only a year. Surprisingly, the hard-line regimes of East Germany and Czechoslovakia crumbled with even greater alacrity. A scant two months after East Germans encamped in Western embassies in great numbers and availed themselves of the opportunity to escape to the

West through the opening in the Hungarian border, the Berlin Wall—the preeminent symbol of the imprisonment of mind, spirit, and flesh under Communism—could not withstand the hunger of the people for freedom and democracy. Czechoslovakia's old-guard leadership did not have the luxury of years or even months of resistance to change; it was swept away in a whirlwind of events in a matter of days.

The prospects for liberty and peace in much of the world will depend on the success of these first tentative steps toward de-totalitarianization. The purpose of this volume, *Totalitarianism at the Crossroads,* is to explore the nature of totalitarianism and plumb its essential aspects, to speculate about the prospects for success of totalitarianism's subjects in liberating themselves from its deadening and often deadly embrace, and to discuss the uncharted path back from the ideological state to a "normal" existence, from central planning to markets, and from thought control to a liberation of the human mind.

Totalitarianism in Disarray

Perestroika and *glastnost,* the one betokening economic restructuring and the other openness or truth-telling, are slogans of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that have captured the imagination of journalists, politicians, and their audiences throughout the world. Despite this worldwide euphoria, *perestroika* is in retreat in the USSR. Mikhail Gorbachev, its chief architect, now frequently denounces the few successful cooperatives (private enterprises) that have sprung up at his invitation. Enterprises caught between the edicts of central planners, price controls, and the new insistence on profitability have resorted to simultaneously raising workers' wages and discontinuing inexpensive product lines, thus exacerbating the chronic shortages of consumer goods. Long lines, endemic to the system, are now longer and the payoff more meager; rationing abounds; staples disappear from the shops never to reappear, even in the major cities.

Glasnost, however, has been more successful, if we measure it by the revelations it has engendered, the revolutionary icons it has undercut, and the mental liberation it has fomented. But its "success" must look like something of a double-edged sword to the men who sit in the Politburo. Gorbachev insists that his reforms have the salvaging of socialism as their objective, to redeem its promise of a better life for the Soviet people. Yet what *glasnost* has revealed to these same people is the millions of slaughtered peasants in the name of the collectivization of

agriculture, the added millions who perished in the Great Purge of the 1930s, and the impoverishment of the Soviet worker compared to his counterparts in the developed world. Social ills formerly assigned solely to the capitalist West are now revealed under *glasnost* to have even more dire manifestations in the East. Soviet readers are treated to a daily feast of poverty, ecological decimation, alcoholism, food shortages, horrific medical care, and a deepening housing crisis.

Glasnost's revelations have undercut the very foundations of the Communist Party's claim to rule. In the Soviet press, one writer calls the October Revolution a coup, another defiles the chief icon, Lenin, as the instigator of concentration camps and the perpetrator of policies that cost millions of lives, and another declares Lenin's co-conspirators no better. In this turbulent atmosphere, it is not surprising that each day brings news of demonstrations, demands for the end of one-party rule, or even more radical calls for independence by one non-Russian republic after another. From Lithuania to Turkestan, Estonia to Georgia, subject peoples are taking the first opportunity since their subjugation to demand an accounting of the historical crimes of the Communist regime and their own manumission.

The erosion of belief in Communism, even the outright detestation of Communism by the peoples of the Soviet republics, ought to be apparent to the Soviet rulers by now. But if they have failed to note this root cause of their troubles in their homeland, it is impossible to evade in the nations captured and held by Soviet tanks. It is an historical truism that once empires cease to expand they crumble; in Afghanistan, the Soviet empire retreated. This undoubtedly gave impetus to the political earthquakes that shook Eastern Europe throughout 1989. If the Soviets retreated in one arena, could they not be vanquished elsewhere?

In such unlikely places as East Germany and Czechoslovakia, tiny coteries of dissidents—suddenly augmented by fractious mobs of mostly young people—took to the streets, risking assault from the riot police. Communist totalitarianism was revealed as a hollow vessel, despised by its progeny and unable to maintain itself in its usual form, once it became clear that tanks from the East would not roll as they had in 1956 and 1968. The "New Man" of Marxism-Leninism, forged in the crucible of an education of indoctrination, censorship, and loyalty to the party, now marched in the streets demanding liberty, free elections, and even a return to private property and capitalism. The notion that the "ideological state" must be replaced by a "normal" state and with it a "normal life" is echoed throughout Eastern Europe. Apparently Marxism-Leninism, at least as judged by those forced to live by its dictates, does not constitute a "normal" life. The revolution to expunge the past—to

rid society of its history, laws, customs, and religions—has proven a colossal failure. Human nature proved resistant to human design, and evolution more "normal" than revolution.

Yet the victory celebrations may be premature; the putrescent beast may still have a few convulsions left in it before it finally succumbs, as the carnage in Tiananmen Square demonstrates. There is, however, one difference between the Chinese and the Soviet predicaments, and this difference may prove decisive: those who called out the troops to shoot the students in China were of the revolutionary generation, while the leaders of the Soviet Union are three generations removed. Perhaps it takes a certain fanaticism that Gorbachev's generation of *apparatchiks* (i.e., Party officials) lacks in order to call out the troops to decimate its own people. Perhaps they do not have the stomach for the mass slaughter, arrests, and deportations that clinging to power may require. Perhaps it is simply too soon to tell, although the gassing and clubbing of peaceful demonstrators in Tbilisi, Georgia by elite Spetsnaz troops under Politburo control suggests that even careerist Leninists can turn murderous.

Amidst the general euphoria in the West over the seeming collapse of Communism, several disturbing notes have gone generally unremarked. As in previous periods of relaxation between the two blocs—of détente—the foreign arm of the KGB is more active than ever, stealing military and technological secrets and suborning foreigners to its service. Events in Eastern Europe seem too pat, maybe even too good, to be true. One day after the breaching of the Berlin Wall, Bulgaria announced the ousting of its supreme leader, Todor I. Zhivkov, and his replacement by a new Communist chief, one embracing reform who said that the people must decide whether the party will maintain its "leading role in society." Where were the dissidents, the huge crowds in the street demanding change? They appeared only afterwards. Instead, it was a case of pure "revolution from above." Bulgaria prompts the skeptic to wonder whether Moscow might not have a grand design lurking behind the apparent chaos, especially when it seems to be egging the chaos on. Do Gorbachev—Andropov's disciple—and his KGB cronies who are now elevated to the Politburo have a grand deception in mind, something that would make the Trust of the 1920s (see John Gray's contribution to this volume) look like a Sunday school picnic? Is Gorbachev willing to offer a Finlandized Eastern Europe in exchange for the breakup of NATO and the disarmament of the West?

Let us hope that the skeptics are, for once, dead wrong, and that what we are witnessing is really the death knell of the Marxist-Leninist totalitarian project. Millions have been sacrificed to realize its utopian

dream; new generations ought not lead twisted lives on the altar of its power, now bereft of promise.

The Essays

Vladimir Bukovsky's "Totalitarianism in Crisis: Is there a Smooth Transition to Democracy?" documents the tremendously destructive impact of Communist totalitarianism in undermining human health and moral character, in decimating the physical environment, in destroying voluntary economic relationships and replacing them with a highly inefficient and technologically backward command economy, and in eradicating legal norms and substituting for them party ukase. Ironically, Bukovsky points out, Marx's dire predictions for the future of capitalism came to pass not for the system that he contemned, but rather in a system whose ruling party embraced Marxian collectivism. The crisis that we are now witnessing is nothing less than the "end of socialism," Bukovsky argues, brought about by the exhaustion of all sources of wealth, both physical and human. Although it was apparent by the 1950s that virtually all of the predictions of "scientific socialism" were erroneous and belief in the ideology had ebbed, the Soviet system nevertheless persisted. What finally brought the colossus to crisis was the enormous drain of resources to support its far-flung empire and the competition from resurgent, prosperous democracies whose economic might and inventiveness the inherently wasteful socialist economy could not match. This system of "social engineering by the means of terror" leaves in its wake a "biological exhaustion, a fatigue of human material." Remarkably, the human spirit has somehow survived almost a century of darkness to arise and demand liberty and national independence, and it may yet withstand the final crisis of totalitarianism.

In "Perestroika and Ideology," Adam Ulam contends that *perestroika* is the result and acknowledgement of a deep ideological crisis. In the past, belief in Marxism-Leninism had been used to justify and mitigate the travails of Soviet society. It enabled the regime to claim that the sufferings of the forced collectivization of 1928–33, of the terror of the 1930s, and the general repressive character of the Soviet state were a necessary price for erecting a more just society in the USSR, and (eventually) a peaceful and stable Communist world order. These beliefs began to crumble in 1956, with the official revelations about the crimes and abuses of the Stalin era. The Sino-Soviet dispute and other fissiparous developments of the international Communist movement demonstrated the unsoundness of the international aspect of Marxist-

Leninist doctrine. Now, in the Gorbachev era, adherence to the canon of Marxism-Leninism has been in fact, even if not explicitly, abandoned by the rulers of the leading Communist state. *Perestroika* has demonstrated the obsolescence of much of Marxism, as well as of its Leninist offshoot. It remains to be seen, Ulam writes, whether and in what form the Soviet regime can survive its current ideological disarray.

In Andrzej Walicki's " 'The Captive Mind' Revisited: Intellectuals and Communist Totalitarianism in Poland," the author engages in a lively reexamination of Czeslaw Milosz's thesis that the uniqueness of totalitarianism consists in attempting to coerce people from within, through controlling their thoughts and feelings. Milosz's classic, *The Captive Mind,* offered a penetrating analysis of the genuine temptations of the totalitarian "New Faith," and a fascinating description of the techniques that the captives employed in an attempt to salvage their separate identities while paying obeisance to the obligatory new faith. The testimonies of other Polish intellectuals who had experienced the heavy pressure of Stalinist ideology, as well as the Russian dissidents' analyses of "dual consciousness," show the remarkable accuracy of Milosz's descriptions. The gradual de-ideologization of the Communist regimes, which took place after Stalin, gave birth to attempts to redefine totalitarianism through deemphasizing its "ideocratic" aspect. Walicki finds all of these attempts unconvincing. He claims that the end of ruthless "ideological mobilization" entails a gradual dismantling of totalitarianism. This is what happened to the Soviet Union and, on a much greater scale, to Poland. Thus, while the classical model of totalitarianism is still useful as a heuristic device, it is necessary to develop a theory of de-totalitarianization.

In "Totalitarianism, Reform and Civil Society," John Gray argues that the totalitarian project is principally one of suppressing civil society, with its distinctive institutions of private property and contractual freedom under the rule of law. In the paradigm Soviet case, this project succeeded in suppressing commodity production and replacing it with the institutions of socialist central planning. Six important episodes in Soviet history are examined in order to show the primacy of Marxist-Leninist ideology and of the institutions of totalitarian bureaucracy in the Soviet state. Totalitarianism is theorized in general terms as a condition of economic chaos contained in a political "state of nature" created by a lawless state. On Gray's analysis, totalitarianism can be reformed by peaceful means and a stable post-totalitarian order achieved only where important institutions of civil society have survived intact. Where civil society has been altogether destroyed, its peaceful recreation is likely to prove difficult or impossible.

Zbigniew Rau's "Four Stages of One Path Out of Socialism" offers a conceptualization of the transition from the totalitarian system to parliamentary democracy and the market economy in the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries. He analyzes this process in terms of a rebirth of civil society: that is, of the emergence and steady growth of independent social groups and movements and their impact upon the totalitarian system. The essay focuses on four stages in the process. The first is the emergence of dissident groups which challenge the system by the creation of alternative concepts and institutions of public life. The second brings about the establishment of "revindication movements" which organize and mobilize the population outside the system. The third is characterized by the launching of independent political parties within these movements which eventually formulate their own political programs in order to compete with the ruling Communist parties in free elections. The fourth and last stage is a takeover by independent political parties and the formation of a non-Communist government.

Roger Scruton, in his essay "Totalitarianism and the Rule of Law," examines the question of whether or not totalitarianism is compatible with the rule of law. If it is not, what possibilities exist for totalitarian societies to change in a legal direction? To answer these questions, Scruton argues, we need to define 'totalitarianism' and 'the rule of law'. The first, he suggests, is defined by a *project:* the total control of society by the ruling party. The second is characterized by the existence of a legal order and the subjection of all power, including the ruling party, to that order. He explores what these conditions involve and shows that, from a study of Communist law and its practice, the totalitarian project and the rule of law are fundamentally incompatible. Finally, he considers the changes that are necessary for a legal order to reemerge from the grave of communism.

Ellen Frankel Paul
December 8, 1989

Totalitarianism in Crisis: Is There a Smooth Transition to Democracy?

Vladimir Bukovsky

In order to define what totalitarianism is, one is usually forced to write a lengthy theoretical treatise or an equally lengthy description of the governmental structures and social institutions typical of a totalitarian state. This is a difficult and thankless task, for apart from being incomprehensible to a non-specialist, such scholarly definition fails to convey the very essence of the subject: its utter inhumanity; its danger for mankind; and the degree of horror and desperation experienced by those unfortunate nations which are entrapped by it. In a way, it also obscures the subject, because we inadvertently tend to compare a totalitarian system with a free democratic one. In doing so, we only compound the confusion. The difference is so enormous that such comparison leads to simplifications, distortions, and ultimately to a notion of "moral equivalence," best expressed in the phrase: "They might be cannibals, but we are not vegetarians either."

A much better way of defining totalitarianism is by comparing it with an ordinary dictatorship; although the difference is still enormous, our minds are more prepared to grasp it. Thus, trade union activity is forbidden under some dictatorships, and this certainly is a violation of the right to organize independent public associations. Totalitarian regimes, however, are still worse in this respect precisely because they have almost 100 percent unionized labor, while their trade unions are just an extension of the ruling party's apparatus, created to grasp the work force even tighter and to prevent any genuine trade-union activity. This is certainly much worse for someone trying to defend the rights of

employees, as he will be forced to struggle not just against the employer—which is difficult in itself—but against a huge organization of professional manipulators with unlimited power. But, if we try to compare free trade unions in a democratic country with totalitarian "trade unions," the differences will be obscured by endless structural and procedural details, incomprehensible to a non-specialist. All we would get after such a comparison is a false impression that the systems are essentially similar except for some technicalities and that, unlike a dictatorship, totalitarianism does permit trade union activity.

The same would be true if we were to compare any totalitarian governmental or social structure and its "counterpart" in a democratic society. In this sense, a totalitarian state will be better defined as a dictatorship which made an additional step away from democracy: instead of simply closing down democratic institutions, it replaced them with look-alike pseudo-institutions designed to prevent any independent public activity. However, the system thus created is immeasurably worse than the most vicious dictatorship one can imagine. Unlike the latter, a totalitarian state controls all spheres of human activity. It forces people to live not only in slavery, but in an atmosphere of constant lies. Above all, it mutilates and corrupts society to such an extent that the way back to democracy becomes practically impossible.

Indeed, while we do not know of a single example of a totalitarian state transforming itself into a democracy (except as a result of a foreign occupation), there have been quite a number of dictatorships even in the last ten to fifteen years which have done so. Furthermore, in most cases the process of transformation was remarkably smooth, quick, and painless, often triggered simply by the death of a dictator (Spain, Portugal), or by a coup (Paraguay), by a failure to suppress the opposition (the Philippines), by international pressure (Chile, South Korea), or even by a dictatorship itself which did not want to maintain its rule any longer (Turkey, Argentina). Needless to say, none of these scenarios could have happened in a totalitarian state. Supreme leaders died (sometimes quite often) or were deposed, but the system continued practically unchanged, and it never hesitated to crush any opposition with the utmost cruelty. As for international pressure, totalitarian regimes—unlike ordinary dictatorships—always enjoy considerable public support in, and special treatment by, the democratic countries. Whatever the reason, one can rely on a democratic society to persuade itself not to put pressure on its totalitarian neighbor.

But most revealing is the ease with which democracy establishes itself in a former dictatorship. One can see how little the fabric of the society was affected by the years, sometimes decades, of dictatorial rule.

Clearly, as Plato said, every democracy carries a germ of dictatorship, and every dictatorship a germ of democracy. Both belong to the same civilization.

Not so with a totalitarian regime. Such an Orwellian society is usually built on the basis of some all-embracing theory, or a religion, embodied in its every structure and institution. Even when no one believes in this theory any longer, the system continues to exist until it exhausts "the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the labourer."[1]

I. Political Dimension

The events of the last decade leave little doubt that we are witnessing the end of socialism, its final stage—a worldwide crisis of the totalitarian system created according to the recipe of "scientific socialism." The idea itself was in trouble for a long time, and like another utopian dream of humanity—perpetual motion—it was at odds with science even at the beginning of this century. Further developments in the natural sciences, particularly in genetics and neurophysiology, ruled out any possibility of such miracles as the creation of a perfect New Man by perfecting social conditions, so much so that Stalin had to proclaim them "bourgeois pseudo-sciences." And contrary to Marxist theory, "collective labor" proved to be far less productive than individually rewarded labor. By the 1950s, virtually all the predictions of "scientific socialism" were obviously incorrect, and the much-expected "world crisis of capitalism" was nowhere in evidence.

But the system still persisted and even continued to expand its influence. If nothing else, the sheer inertia of this giant, its ideological rigidity, the absence of any feedback mechanism in its structure (except for the automatic suppression of dissent), as well as the self-interest of the ruling elite, still kept it going. Propaganda replaced achievements, coercion replaced belief, fear and apathy replaced revolutionary fervor, while subversion, manipulation, or military expansion were employed to promote "inevitable" socialist revolutions abroad. Internally, it was too powerful and ruthless to be successfully challenged by the people; externally, ideological sympathy and the specter of nuclear holocaust paralyzed the will of Western democracies, and no intentional challenge was ever presented.

There were, however, two factors limiting its life: finite internal resources and the ever-growing burden of external competition. No matter how peaceful their intentions might be, the mere existence of prosperous democracies and their more than modest efforts to maintain