

# CENTRAL EUROPE

**SINCE 1945**

**PAUL G LEWIS**



# *Central Europe since 1945*

*Paul G. Lewis*



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## CENTRAL EUROPE SINCE 1945

## The Postwar World

General Editors: A.J. Nicholls and Martin S. Alexander

As distance puts events into perspective, and as evidence accumulates, it begins to be possible to form an objective historical view of our recent past. *The Postwar World* is an ambitious new series providing a scholarly but readable account of the way our world has been shaped in the crowded years since the Second World War. Some volumes will deal with regions, or even single nations, others with important themes; all will be written by expert historians drawing on the latest scholarship as well as their own research and judgements. The series should be particularly welcome to students, but it is designed also for the general reader with an interest in contemporary history.

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Central Europe since 1945 *Paul G. Lewis*

# *Abbreviations and Acronyms*

AFD	Alliance of Free Democrats (Hungary)
AK	(Polish) Home Army
AVH	State Protection Authority (Hungarian secret police)
CDP	Civic Democratic Party
CDU	Christian Democratic Union (Germany)
CF	Civic Forum (Czechoslovakia)
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance; also COMECON
COCOM	Coordinating Committee (Economic arm of North Atlantic Treaty Organization)
COMINFORM	Communist Information Bureau
COMPSTEP	Comprehensive Programme for Scientific and Technological Progress
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DBD	Democratic Farmers' Party (Germany)
EC	European Community
FDGB	Confederation of Free Trade Unions (East Germany)
FIDESZ	Alliance of Young Democrats (Hungary)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate (Soviet military intelligence)
HSP	Hungarian Socialist Party
HSWP	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party
INF	Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces
KLD	Liberal Democratic Congress (Poland)

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KOR	Workers' Defence Committee (Poland)
KPCz	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
KPD	German Community Party
KPN	Confederation of Independent Poland
KPP	Polish Communist Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (Germany)
MDF	Hungarian Democratic Forum
MDP	Hungarian Workers' Party
MDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia
HSWP	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party
MVD	Soviet Interior Ministry
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDPD	National Democratic Party of Germany
NEM	New Economic Mechanism (Hungary)
NKVD	Soviet Security Organization
NSZ	National Armed Forces group (Poland)
OKP	Citizens' Parliamentary Club (Poland)
ORMO	Volunteer Citizens' Militia Reserve (Poland)
OPZZ	National Trade Union Accord (Poland)
PAV	Public Against Violence (Slovakia)
PCC	Political Consultative Committee (of the WTO)
PCF	French Communist Party
PDS	Reformed Communist Party
PPR	Polish Worker's Party
PPS	Polish Socialist Party
PSL	Polish Peasant Party
PUS	Polish Social-Democratic Union
PZPR	Polish United Workers' Party
ROAD	Citizens' Movement for Democratic Action (Poland)
SD	Democratic Party (Poland)
SdRP	Social Democracy of the Polish Republic
SED	Socialist Unity Party (East Germany)
SMAD	Soviet Military Administration in Germany
SMERSH	Soviet military counter-intelligence organization
SNB	National Security Corps (Czechoslovakia)
SPD	(West Germany) Social Democratic Party
UD	Democratic Union (Poland)
VdgB	Farmers' Mutual Aid Association (East Germany)

*Abbreviations and Acronyms*

VONS	Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted (Czechoslovakia)
WAK	Catholic Election Action (Poland)
WTO	Warsaw Treaty Organization
ZSL	United Peasant Party (Poland)



# *Editorial Foreword*

The aim of this series is to describe and analyse the history of the World since 1945. History, like time, does not stand still. What seemed to many of us only recently to be 'current affairs', or the stuff of political speculation, has now become material for historians. The editors feel that it is time for a series of books which will offer the public judicious and scholarly, but at the same time readable, accounts of the way in which our present-day world was shaped by the years after the end of the Second World War. The period since 1945 has seen political events and socio-economic developments of enormous significance for the human race, as important as anything which happened before Hitler's death or the bombing of Hiroshima. Ideologies have waxed and waned, the industrialised economies have boomed and bust, empires have collapsed, new nations have emerged and sometimes themselves fallen into decline. While we can be thankful that no major armed conflict has occurred between the so-called superpowers, there have been many other wars, and terrorism has become an international plague. Although the position of ethnic minorities has dramatically improved in some countries, it has worsened in others. Nearly everywhere the status of women has become an issue which politicians have been unable to avoid. These are only some of the developments we hope will be illuminated by this series as it unfolds.

The books in the series will not follow any set pattern; they will vary in length according to the needs of the subject. Some will deal with regions, or even single nations, and others with themes. Not all of them will begin in 1945, and the terminal date may similarly vary; once again, the time-span chosen will be appropriate to the

question under discussion. All the books, however, will be written by expert historians drawing on the latest fruits of scholarship, as well as their own expertise and judgement. The series should be particularly welcome to students, but it is designed also for the general reader with an interest in contemporary history. We hope that the books will stimulate scholarly discussion and encourage specialists to look beyond their own particular interests to engage in wider controversies. History, and particularly the history of the recent past, is neither 'bunk' nor an intellectual form of stamp-collecting, but an indispensable part of an educated person's approach to life. If it is not written by historians it will be written by others of a less discriminating and more polemical disposition. The editors are confident that this series will help to ensure the victory of the historical approach, with consequential benefits for its readers.

A.J. Nicholls

Martin S. Alexander

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# *Preface*

Considerably after the event, I learnt that I had been born the day after Danzig and Gdynia had been liberated from Nazi rule by the Red Army and during the night the last V-bomb of the Second World War fell on London. I am, then, very much a member of the generation that has lived through the “long peace” of the post-war period and experienced the lengthy period of stability in Europe that the post-war settlement brought into being. The cost at which that stability was obtained, however, was not always fully appreciated by the nations of the West and it is only recently that some of its implications have become more fully apparent. The peace and stability enjoyed by many Europeans like myself was accompanied by the imposition of considerably less advantageous conditions on the peoples to the east of the former Federal Republic of Germany. It was precisely the ambiguous form taken by the liberation of towns like Gdynia and Danzig (Gdańsk in Polish) that underwrote the oppressive nature of the stability imposed on much of Central Europe and the coerced peace that the period of communist rule brought to the region. Only much later did signs of the ultimate collapse of the communist system also become apparent in Gdańsk with the emergence of a solidly organized free trade union movement under the leadership of a hitherto unknown shipyard electrician called Lech Wałęsa.

The experience of post-war Europe has, therefore, been a diverse one and it is only after a near-half century of division and separation that the implications of that diversity are becoming more clear. Nowhere has the anomaly of this separation been more obvious than in the countries of Central Europe, which were particularly ill-suited to the situation that developed following the

division of the continent into clearly demarcated eastern and western portions. It is the task of this book to chart the role of the different forces that have, during this period, acted on the region and interacted to produce the complex condition of post-communism, tentative democratization and problematic capitalist development that has emerged during the 1990s. Their history did not, of course, begin in 1945 and so, while the main focus is directed to the events of the communist period, attention is also paid to developments before 1945 and the pre-war history of the region. The book ranges, therefore, from the pre-communist period, through the years of Soviet-sponsored rule, to the recent period of post-communism – although by far the larger part is devoted to an account of developments under communism in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland.

It aims to provide a general survey of the key events that marked a near-half century in the life of a sizeable portion of European society (some 80 million people in the 1980s – roughly the size of the unified Germany that was formed soon afterwards). It is, then, by no means a specialist work and presents a narrative and general analysis of major developments in political, economic, social and cultural spheres. As such, it should be accessible to students from a variety of disciplines as well as the more generally interested reader. Covering a broad geographical area and a lengthy historical period it also draws on a range of sources, only some of which can be listed as formal references. A wide-ranging literature, many discussions of a formal and informal nature, and numerous visits to the region since the 1960s have contributed to the general view of Central Europe presented here. More specific acknowledgements and individual debts are acknowledged in the text, although I should also like to express gratitude for the helpful comments and careful reading of earlier drafts by the general editors of this series. Any remaining errors and peculiarities of judgement must remain my responsibility.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# *Introduction and General Survey*

## PERSPECTIVES ON CENTRAL EUROPEAN HISTORY

The writing of this book spanned the period during which the grip of communist power over Central Europe, for several post-war decades a seemingly immovable barrier to political and, increasingly, economic change, weakened and then suddenly disappeared completely. As a contribution to a series of books on the post-war world this volume suddenly assumed, therefore, a different status. It had initially been conceived as setting out to depict a course of events and describe the situation they created within a different framework – one in which a major part of Europe had emerged from Nazi rule only to be plunged into a further, more prolonged period of dictatorship and political oppression whose end was surely overdue but whose removal hardly appeared in imminent prospect. Until the very end of the 1980s Central Europe had the appearance of an historical region still submerged by the post-war flow of Cold War currents and which only with difficulty maintained a shadowy, if distinct, identity within a broader area of Sovietized Europe.

Suddenly, however, much of the nature and experience of post-war Central Europe became 'historical' in the sense of forming part of a closed chapter in the history of the region – one characterized by social conditions, forms of rule and economic organization whose ineffectiveness and unnatural basis seemed not just inappropriate and wasteful but now also archaic. From an existing social system which, whatever the judgments passed on it, had an undeniable existence and worked (despite its many shortcomings) to a greater or lesser extent, European communism