

As Part of the Festival “**Performing Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe**”
The Harriman Institute at Columbia University, in association with the Polish Cultural Institute,
Romanian Cultural Institute New York, and Austrian Cultural Forum present a Symposium

“After Communism: Achievement and Disillusionment since 1989”

26-27 February, 2010

Faculty House, President’s Room, 64 Morningside Drive, Columbia University

This symposium brings together scholars, politicians, dissidents and writers from both sides of the Atlantic to assess the global meaning of the revolutions of 1989 for Central and Eastern Europe and the world. Since the collapse of communism, the world has seen rapid globalization, new geopolitical realities and conflicts, and a global economic crisis. Have these events called into question the certainties of the early post-Cold War world, which held that liberal democracy and laissez-faire capitalism had proven victorious? Or does the advance of liberal democracy in the region and across the globe suggest that the optimism of the early 1990s was justified?

Friday, February 26

2:00pm *What Was Communism and Why Did It End?*

Speakers will discuss the nature of communism as ideology, political system, economic system, social system, welfare state, and so on. Some reflections might seem obvious, but imaginative thinking about communism’s effect on social and intellectual life is encouraged. Then, participants will assess both the international and domestic sources of the collapse. The possible explanations run from Gorbachev, to economic roots, to legitimization crisis theory, to what Dan Chirot referred to as “moral rot.”

Speakers:

Adam Michnik, Editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*
Archie Brown, Author of *The Rise and Fall of Communism*
Vlad Muresan, Romanian Political Philosopher, University of Cluj

Moderator: Mircea Mihaies, Romanian Cultural Institute

3:45pm *What is Post-Communism and When Does It End?*

What does it mean, across the worlds of politics, culture and society, to be “post-communist?” Social scientists have been keen to document the economic and political aspects of emergent democracy in the region, and aspects of that should certainly be addressed. However, it is also helpful to focus on post-communism as a condition. Are people “post-communist?” If so, what does that mean? At what point should we stop/have stopped referring to these states and peoples as post-communist? What characteristics from the communist era, or even the “post-communist” one need to disappear before we can say that a society is no longer post-communist?

Speakers:

Katherine Verdery, City University of New York
Paul Dragos Aligica, Political Scientist, Mercatus Center, George Mason University
Slawomir Sierakowski, Founder and Editor of *Krytyka Polityczna*

Moderator: Monika Fabianska, Polish Cultural Institute

5:30pm *The End of History?*

The fall of communism gave rise to a set of beliefs, at least two of which will be discussed. The first was that, with the end of the Cold War, liberal democracy proved itself the best form of government and that no further political evolution is necessary. However, while dictatorship has been discredited, the EU and the US have relatively different models of democratic politics. These differences beg the question whether there should further evolution and, if so, in what direction? The second thesis was that the end of the Cold War proved that liberal capitalism was the best of all economic systems. The global economic crisis and the renationalization of sections of the economy raise questions for this thesis. On the other hand, the spread of liberal democracy and free markets across the globe over the last 20 years and lack of coherent alternatives seems to support the “end of history” thesis.

Speakers:

Alfred Gusenbauer, Former Chancellor of Austria

Michael Scammell, School of the Arts, Columbia University

Stephen Sestanovich, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

Moderator: Andreas Stadler, Austrian Cultural Forum

7:15pm **Film Presentation**

12:08 East of Bucharest (Dir. Corneliu Porumboiu, Romania 2006)

A provincial television station decides that it’s going to produce a show on the occasion of the 16th anniversary of the fall of the communist government, focusing on what transpired in that town at the exact time that Ceaușescu fell. Unhappily, the only two eyewitnesses the station can find are a hard-drinking history teacher and an elderly retiree who works as part-time Santa Claus. The show begins, and the two panel guests pour out their versions of what happened on Dec. 22, 1989. It doesn’t take long for viewers to start phoning in their own versions of that day, often taking the eye witnesses to task for what they think are outright distortions. History—who remembers, and how—is at the heart of Corneliu Porumboiu’s “12:08 East of Bucharest,” co-winner of the Camera D’Or (Best First Film) at 2006 Cannes Film Festival. Porumboiu cleverly captures how even recent historical events take on shape and meaning according to how they explain or justify the present. — *Richard Pena, Program Director, Film Society of Lincoln Center*

(Screening courtesy of Palisades Tartan)

Saturday, February 27th

2:00pm *The Legacy of Dissent*

The dissidents are among the most discussed topics of the period of communist rule. The focus of this panel, then, should not be on what they did, but what the lasting effects of their actions and words are. What effects did their words and actions have on thinking about social activism? What is their legacy, if any, in the sphere of politics? With the benefit of hindsight, how do we assess the role and importance of the so-called “grey zone?” Could it be that the dissidents’ moral example created the conditions for the development of the cynicism discussed in the following panel? Or does the role of the dissidents under communism continue to provide some guideposts for morality in the public sphere?

Speakers:

Erhard Busek, Former Vice-Chancellor of Austria
Horia-Roman Patapievici, Political Philosopher, President, Romanian Cultural Institute
Ira Katznelson, Political Scientist, Columbia University

Moderator: Catharine Nepomnyashchy, Barnard College, Columbia University

3:45pm *Unfulfilled Promises? Democracy and Disillusionment*

The first years after 1989 were filled with excitement and outpourings of profound belief in the fashioning of a truly new democratic politics. However, the results have been more mixed, with corruption, scandal and “normal politics” eroding people’s faith in the political system in many countries. Here speakers may wish to explore the relationship between the hopes and ideals of 1989 and the rise of disillusionment among segments of the population later. Were the expectations placed on the rebirth of democracy too high? Or has democracy so taken root that publics now largely take it for granted?

Speakers:

Angelo Mitchievici, Romanian Novelist and Film Critic
Elzbieta Matynia, The New School for Social Research
Valerie Bunce, Political Scientist, Cornell University

Moderator: Corina Suteu, Romanian Cultural Institute

5:30pm *Creating a Narrative About the Communist Past*

How do people from individual countries frame the communist era in relation to the rest of their nation’s past. Some simply write it off as an aberration brought by the Soviet Union. But others trace some lines of continuity as well. Participants should also consider the broader narratives of European history. For decades, there was a Western European narrative (increasing prosperity and integration) and an Eastern European one (Stalinism, revisionism, decay collapse). With the ever closer integration of the Eastern European states and peoples with their Western neighbors, is the time coming for a truly “European” history of the twentieth century? Moreover, what role does the legacy of the cold war have for narratives about communism?

Speakers:

Ben Barber, Distinguished Senior Fellow, DEMOS Institute and Rutgers University

Stephen Kotkin, Historian, Princeton University

Vladimir Tismaneanu, Professor of Politics, Author of *Fantasies of Salvation*

Moderator: Timothy Frye, Harriman Institute, Columbia University