classical concept of totalitarianism, hides reasons for both stability and change in state socialist systems. In order to understand these phenomena, one has to comprehend which societal groups viewed their interests as protected by the socialist order. The fact that socialist systems could not exist without being considered legitimate by relevant parts of society is proven, among other things, by attempts at reform that were inspired both “from above” and by parts of the critical, but loyal intelligentsia. Last but not least, the continuity of elites after 1989 demonstrates the importance of taking into account a societal reality which might very well deviate from the relationships of power being proclaimed: In the late period of state socialism, informal relationships of power and property had long since been established, which could easily be transposed into the period following the turnover.

**TOTALITARIANISM AS THEORY AND AS CZECH “TOTÁČ”**

*Jan Pauer*

Miloš Havelka’s attempt at characterizing the years 1939 to 1956 as a “totalitarian period” in Czech history raises a number of questions. Both the varying approaches at conceptualizing totalitarianism and the large number of historical phenomena make it doubtful that it is justified to claim an “internal commonality” for the period under scrutiny. Rather than in the definition of historical periods, theories of totalitarianism have their application for comparisons of dictatorial regimes. In the context of the Czech discourse about totalitarianism, which largely restrains itself to the communist kind of dictatorship, Havelka delivers, by taking into account national socialist rule as well, an important impulse which might result in some light being shed on the connections between both dictatorships. Petr Pithart’s claim about the consequences for the transformation after 1989 of a misinterpretation of totalitarian dictatorship is relevant not so much for the economic transformation, but rather for widespread societal pathologies which were a central pillar of dictatorial rule.

**ADVANTAGES AND LIMITS OF A PARADIGM**

**THE THEORY OF TOTALITARIANISM APPLIED TO EAST CENTRAL EUROPEAN STATE SOCIALISM**

*Bianca Hoenig*

The theory of totalitarianism experienced a kind of boom after the collapse of the “Iron Curtain,” predominantly in the nations belonging to the former Eastern bloc and in connection with attempts in these nations at coming to terms with their socialist past. Whereas particularly in the West this concept is frequently criticized, throughout Eastern Europe it has met with broad acceptance to this very day. Examining research efforts devoted to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR, the
author analyzes in this contribution how the theory of totalitarianism is being applied and what results this produces. The literature examined is divided into studies devoted to the claims used to justify totalitarian rule and those devoted to totalitarian rule in reality, with the focus being on questions pertaining to the normative force of science, the possibilities of explaining dynamics of governmental power, and to people involved in the changes observed. All these factors demonstrate that the theory of totalitarianism is of limited value for the historiographic evaluation of state socialism in East Central Europe, albeit as a phenomenon of contemporary history it does merit attention.

AGAINST A “BISECTED CONSCIOUSNESS”? 
RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS A PERSPECTIVE ON THE EVENTS OF 1968 TRANSCENDING IDEOLOGICAL BLOCS

Jan Arend

Taking into account aspects of the 1968 events in Eastern and Western Europe common to both political blocs might open up an interesting field of research if comparative aspects and those pertaining to a historiography of inter-bloc interdependencies are successfully combined. Recent scholarly publications suggest three areas to which this might be applied: political programs and orientations of the acting people, the extent to which lifestyles and mentalities on both sides of the Iron Curtain mutually influenced each other, and meetings between actors from East and West and the results for their perception of each other. A synopsis of the conclusions proposed demonstrates that developments in Eastern and Western Europe were similar in their anti-governmental thrust. Sometimes, this similarity was due to true mutual perceptions and real influences. Misunderstandings and projections, however, were of similar importance for this history of interdependence as was the adoption of cultural and ideological imports specific to the respective bloc and context.