

## FLORIDA CONFERENCE ON CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The Eighth Biennial Conference on Central and Eastern Europe took place on 3–5 April 1997 at the New College of the University of South Florida in Sarasota. About 250 persons attended, of whom 95 presented papers in 31 panel sessions. The conferences were launched in 1979 by László Deme, a professor of history in the Division of Social Sciences of New College, who coordinates their programs. The New College Conferences are relatively small in scale and have no overall theme. Twentieth-century topics predominate. Participants are an international mix of historians, political scientists, economists, and social scientists from North America and Europe. They present the result of current research while enjoying an attractive campus bor-

dered by Sarasota Bay, an arm of the Gulf of Mexico. Three or four papers are presented at each panel, but discussants are omitted so as to maximize audience response.

The 1997 conference featured three provocative addresses at plenary sessions by senior scholars. The first was a wide-ranging survey by Peter F. Sugar (Seattle) of "Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century." According to Sugar, fanatics like Gavrilo Princip "destroyed a beautiful world" by their actions. They fomented a divisive ethnocentrism by equating the nation with the state and a geographic area. Only the Czechs rejected this path between the wars. Present-day politicians such as Slobodan Milošević and Vladimír Mečiar exploit appeals to ethnicity to undermine traditional institutions and enhance their power. They keep alive the threat of regression to communist controls. Eastern Europe needs statesmen who will look beyond ethnic loyalties, promote education for citizenship, and oppose the corrosive nationalism that has dominated the twentieth century, Sugar concluded, but this is a task that may take two generations to fulfil.

Rudolf F. Tökés (Storrs, CT) gave the second address on "Antipolitics, Participation, and Citizenship in Post-Communist Hungary." His motif was that the Eastern European revolutions of 1989–90 occurred to the benefit of elites, not the mass of the electorate. When evaluating post-communist élites, one must not overlook the communists, who sought to institutionalize certain policies before their fall. Dissidents in Hungary really did not talk about maximum goals but about power-sharing in a new kind of civil society. George Soros, a "conceited billionaire", is promoting civil society in an attempt to "clone Marx"; however, the building blocks of democracy rest on the antipolitics of "the unwashed public", whom the elites are not training to use their freedom by voting. The prognosis for democracy is not good, Tökés said. Social and ideological changes are inadequate, public consciousness lags, and elected officials are sheltered from public pressures by special laws. Post-communist élites, entrenched in the media, banking, and politics fight with each other, while trying to manipulate the masses for political ends. Tökés cautioned that "the pendulum between totalitarianism and democracy is still in motion in Eastern Europe."

Tökés's remarks provoked Géza Jeszensky (Budapest) in the audience to ask whether he saw any "ray of hope." Tökés replied that, apart from a few among the intellectuals who were competent administrators, most did not know how to run a state; yet without a strong state there is no middle class, and without a bourgeoisie there is no democracy. The assets of states throughout Eastern Europe are being transferred on a non-economic basis to form new elites. Only the Poles are privatizing fully. "Civil society is happening", Tökés said, "but as a rearguard action by marginalized political and social elites that cannot build a strong state."

Stephen Fischer-Galati (Boulder) remarked that Soros's money gave the Hungarian intelligentsia a unique quality "with their Jewish intellectuals and lots of old stalinists." Responding, Tökés observed that antisemitism in Hungary exists on the extreme fringes of politics. This was a great achievement of the 1989 revolution, but the country is still far from a tolerant society. It needs role models who were not discredited corrupt figures. He foresaw a lengthy transition period during which 30 per cent, the older generation, will die out so that a new, young one can rise up. Outside

capital will be needed to effect change; after all, American interests reportedly put up \$ 400 000 to elect "our boy Václav Havel."

The third plenary address was delivered by Stephen Fischer-Galati on "The Relevance of Eastern Europe in Contemporary International Relations." He began with a question: What is the concept that lost validity after the Second World War? Europe has long looked down on its east with Turks, Greeks, and Moscovites. In Washington, DC, diplomats cannot tell the difference between Budapest and Bucharest. Eastern Europe is important to the United States only because outside powers use it for their own interests. Its chief characteristics are terrorism, antisemitism, unreliability, antiimperialism, nationalism, and struggles for independence and legitimacy. None of this bothered the Great Powers unless the Russians were involved. After 1945, this changed when the United States became a world factor; but since the U. S. was not much interested in what went on behind the Iron Curtain, coexistence prevailed. Further, there were no significant Bulgarian, Hungarian, or Romanian voting constituencies in the U. S. Fischer-Galati then asked: How does NATO's projected expansion fit into this picture? By and large, East Europeans have not fought well since Mohács and White Mountain, and the Poles only in 1920 against the Russians. Yet NATO represents the only hope of retaining an American presence in Europe. NATO defies reality by expanding eastward: democracy is not growing there, and the ethnic vote in the U. S. is now meaningless. Economically, Fischer-Galati quipped, "Eastern Europe is a serious joke." And in practical terms it is safer for America to deal with China because there is less of a chance of a revolution occurring there than among the dissatisfied, antiurban populations of Eastern Europe.

The panel presentations covered a great variety of subjects, some of which among the following may be most germane here. Milada Polišínská (Praha/Lubbock, TX), using NKVD documents, threw light on "The Deportation of Czechoslovak Citizens to the Gulag, 1945-1950." She explained that Czechoslovakia probably could not have prevented the forced transfer of tens of thousands from the country after the war because of the operation of the NKVD in the country and the connivance of KSČ officials from Vladimír Clementis, State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then Foreign Minister, on down to local communists in the Czech regions and Slovakia. The Soviets wanted the transfers to cleanse the "White emigration" and provide forced labor; the KSČ favored removal of "politically unsuitable" and "bourgeois" persons who could oppose it in forthcoming elections and retard the country's shift into the soviet sphere. Many deportees disappeared in the Gulag, others were repatriated. The Soviets claimed 95,560 eventually returned, a figure many thousands less than that calculated by the Czechoslovak ministry in Moscow.

Of considerable value was the paper by Alena Aissing (Gainesville, FL) on "The Book Market in Post-Communist Russia and Eastern Europe," which heavily emphasized the Czech and Slovak situations. She researched her topic in the ČSFR to ascertain why U. S. libraries had difficulty getting books from there. Since 1948, the heavy hand of communism prevented many works judged politically incorrect from being published or distributed. After 1989, the subsidized, labor intensive publishing system broke down. *Nakladatelství Academia* went from 89 employees to 34 by 1991; deliveries to bookstores dropped, and stalls in Metro stations and on the street com-

peted with them. Some publishers issued hugely excessive editions and failed, but new houses sprang up. Before 1989, only one dealt with literature in translation; today there are 200. Some publishers have opened their own stores (*Karolinum*) and form networks with independent bookstores. The quality of works displayed differs greatly between Prague and Brno and those in small towns. Interest in the former dissident culture has dropped as Western media become widespread. Romances, light entertainment, spiritual works, and cookbooks overshadow scholarly works. A mature industry has emerged, but foreign bookdealers, librarians, editors of professional journals, and scholars often lack prompt and full information about new publications.

Other panel speakers on Czech and Slovak topics were Robert K. Evanson (Kansas City, MO), "Czechoslovakia and Visegrád from Havel to Klaus"; Michael Kraus (Middlebury, VT), "International Forces and Factors in the Demise of the Czech-Slovak Federation"; Cyril K. Ling (Bloomington, IL), "Škoda, the Rebirth of a Century-Old Car Maker"; Allison K. Stanger (Middlebury, VT), "Lessons from the Dissolution of Czechoslovakia," and Stanley B. Winters (Port Charlotte, FL), "The Forgotten Occupation: The U.S. Army in Western Czechoslovakia, May–November 1945."

Among papers covering larger, regional issues one notes the well documented study by Thomas Stark (Budapest), "Population Transfers, Forced Migration, and Ethnic Cleansing: Central Europe, 1938–1949"; Lee Kendall (Tallahassee, FL), "Democratic Collapse or Democratic Consolidation? Presidential Power in East Central Europe"; György Csepili (Budapest), "Eastern European Social Science: In Transition or in Decline?"; William Anderson (Macomb, IL), "The Debate on Enlarging NATO"; Lars K. Hallstrom (Lafayette, IN), "Industry, Economy, and Ecology: The Role of the Environment in the East-West Division of Eastern Europe," and Hubert Two-recki (Atlanta), "Political Parties and Voting Patterns in Central Europe, 1989–1996".

Speakers dealing with specific countries included Peter Bergmann, "Nietzsche's View of Eastern Europe", Géza Jeszensky, "Hungary's Recent Treaties with Her Neighbors"; Ireneusz Krzeminski (Warsaw), "National Identity, Xenophobia, and Anti-Semitism in Post-Communist Poland"; Thomas G. Lane (Cincinnati), "Ethnic Rivalries in the Breakup of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia"; János Mazsu (Debrecen), "Recent Hungarian Historiography on the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867," and Steven Béla Vardy (Pittsburgh), "American Historical Scholarship on Hungary in the 1990s." Also worthy of mention was an *in situ* researched paper by Attiat F. Ott (Worcester, MA), "Land Reform in Estonia: From Restitution to Taxation," with observations pertinent to land reforms elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

The informality and cordial atmosphere of the Biennial Conference culminated, as always, at the banquet for participants traditionally hosted by New College and held in elegant College Hall, which fronts on Sarasota Bay. As the wine flowed and East European music filled the banquet hall, the laughter and animated conversations at the dinner tables presaged that many of those present would return for future conferences.

Port Charlotte, Florida

Stanley B. Winters