

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITS OF A PARADIGM  
THE THEORY OF TOTALITARIANISM APPLIED TO EAST  
CENTRAL EUROPEAN STATE SOCIALISM

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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.