

*Christian, Michel: Camarades ou apparatchiks? Les communistes en RDA et en Tchécoslovaquie, 1945-1989.*

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Michel Christian's study echoes the growing interest in scholarship on the social history of ruling communist parties by offering a complex long-term comparison. With its choice of the SED and the KSČ, the book compares parties that in many respects were the two most similar in the Bloc. Both the domination within the two parties and the interaction between them and their respective broader society are explored. Christian's primary focus on the lowest levels of the parties does not prevent him from examining their overall political transformation. It was, he argues, precisely at the level of basic organisations where power and society intersected. A stronger emphasis is placed on the 1950s and 1960s, but the years of "normalisation" or "developed socialism" in the 1970s and 1980s are substantially represented as well.

The scope of Christian's scholarship is impressive, based as it is on a vast body of central and regional archival material from both the Czech Republic and Germany. While focusing on membership composition, the study also portrays the major shifts in the parties' institutional shape and inner workings with great sophistication. The first part analyses the period of the making of the SED and the KSČ in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, depicting the social, religious, ethnic, gender and political background of their members (including former Social Democrats and NSDAP members). These structural analyses are essential for a better understanding of the parties' reaction to the working-class upheavals of 1953 in the GDR and Czechoslovakia. The second part examines the 1950s as the decade of the "construction of socialism." While still giving space to statistics (recruitment, turnover of functionaries etc.), this section shifts emphasis towards the "party life" at the level of basic organisations, with the cadre system, ideological education and the practice of party meetings represented in great detail. It is from this perspective that major events such as the Slánský affair of 1952, the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU and the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 are examined, displaying the heterogeneity of positions and a sense of uncertainty in the party base. Christian's treatment of the 1960s is likewise nonstandard, as he takes issue with the teleological reading of the decade as a mere prelude to the Prague Spring. By contrast, he points out the stabilisation of the apparatus and of "party life" as well as the increasing integration of the parties within society, manifested as it was in the growing membership of professional classes and intelligentsia. The mode of domination within the parties transformed from disciplinary and punitive procedures to educative measures. For the 1970s and 1980s, Christian underlines both parties' continuing capacity for renewal and integration. Although this stabilisation froze social advancement, it did not prevent the parties from recruiting members from all classes. Only in the late 1980s did recruitment numbers decline significantly, especially among the youth and the working class, mirroring a lukewarm attitude towards perestroika and anticipating the communists' defeatist behaviour in 1989.

Thanks to its well-balanced examination of two cases Michel Christian's pivotal study marks a huge leap forward in the comparative history of state socialism and

sets the stage for further investigations. These might include studies on the social history of the successor parties in the post-communist period, aiming at a better understanding of their ideological diversity that has ranged widely from neo-Stalinist nostalgia and social democracy to tribal nationalism.