

## On the Transformation of "Unresponsive" Societies: The Case of State Socialism<sup>1</sup>

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The 1989 transitions in Eastern Europe raise certain old questions of social transformation in a new light. These transitions were unexpected, they were largely non-violent, they were "refolutions," reformist changes with a revolutionary outcome, *i.e.* they were marked by the abolition of the socialist party-state and by reform policies that tried to move these societies in the direction of private market economies, democratic politics, and the rule of law. In Amitai Etzioni's language, they were transformative reforms.

In effect, then, the 1989 political transitions were not equivalent to the many political protests against, and internal economic reform strategies initiated by state socialist ruling elites during their 70 or 40-year history. Such events had occurred intermittently in almost all East European societies in the wake of Stalin's death in 1953 and after Khrushchev's first attempt at de-Stalinization at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. The various non-transformative reforms between 1957 and 1968 had focused on changing economic policy and rendering the planned economy more flexible and responsive. Of particular importance were the reforms proposed by Jevgeny Liberman, who in 1962 suggested pegging planning levels to the world market and establishing a "rentability rate" within state enterprises. These reform ideas anticipated certain versions of economic restructuring (e.g. the "new economic system") in line with the Marxist theoretical significance of the economic infrastructure as the lever of change. Yet, in spite of growing problems of planning and productivity as well as mounting evidence of serious

structural contradictions, these reform efforts would not become official policy until much later, for example, in the form of Deng Xiaoping's post-Maoist new economic course in the early 1980's and Gorbachev's perestroika in 1985/86. In contrast to the Chinese leadership, however, Gorbachev lost control of the process of internal transformation when he added elements of political liberalization (*glasnost*) to the equation, and when he announced his policy of non-intervention vis-a-vis the rest of Eastern Europe in October 1989. This decision initiated an unprecedented political chain reaction which even Gorbachev's own vision did not survive.

Initially, the 1989 transitions were viewed by almost all Eastern European ruling parties as possible continuities of some of the earlier reforms, *i.e.* as transformations within, but not of state socialism. In the 1989 Roundtable talks between the rulers and the opposition, party leaders felt they could still negotiate a compromise, and the opposition was itself not always sure, or even aware, of its power and of the degree to which things had moved beyond the point of no return. I think it is this quite unusual and novel belief in the possibility of negotiation, conflict resolution, and compromise on the part of some of the ruling elites, fueled by their hope for survival, that prevented the use of state violence until it was too late. By contrast, the Chinese rulers had time to contemplate the potential outcome of negotiation and decided in favor of political and military repression, for which the 1989 confrontation at Tiananmen Square has become emblematic. Yet at the same time, China resumed its economic reforms and its movement toward a version of state guided market socialism, but within a non-democratic framework.

As it turned out, the 1989 transitions were not as radical as many had hoped. Incremental, more moderate (and perhaps more desperate and provisional) economic reform policies of Communist successor parties have returned in democratic garb in Russia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania and Slovakia. With the exception of the Czech Republic and, of course, the former East Germany, there is a much higher degree of structural continuity between pre-1989 and post-1989 economic conditions than had been anticipated. Nevertheless, the existing reform efforts are now occurring within a more or less democratic context and within a new political framework of transformation. Therefore, the question arises whether and to what extent (1) Stalinist totalitarianism, (2) post-Stalinist and liberal Communist societies, and (3) post-Communist societies could and did transform themselves. In this context, I am also interested in the issue of whether and in what way the new reform elites can transform their formerly "unresponsive" societies into "active societies," Etzioni's ideal type that is high in flexibility and responsiveness and hovers between liberal democracies, on the one hand, and communitarian as well as authoritarian political systems, on the other.

In the following, I want to examine the concepts of responsiveness and flexibility as well as some of the hypotheses that can be extracted from Etzioni's discussion in Chapter 18 of his *The Active Society* (1968). These hypotheses are applied initially to the transformative capacity of totalitarian societies, the prime examples of which were national socialism and state socialism, particularly Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. This paper is limited to the case of state socialism, starting out with the Soviet Union. I then examine comparatively some of the East Central European variants of state socialism in their attempts to transform themselves both before and after 1989. In this way, I hope to isolate some of the factors that might give concrete meaning to the notion of an unresponsive society that has the capacity, against all odds, to transform itself into an active or semi-active one.

I want to set aside the difficult contextual question, whether it was Western military pressure and the Cold War that brought state so-

cialism down in the Soviet Union, and whether it is now, after a period of painful shock therapy and austerity measures, the unbridled use of capitalist economic policy that accounts for the few relatively successful cases of conversion, for example, the Czech Republic and Poland. While the residue of Parsonian systems theory in Etzioni's approach would demand a parallel consideration of the system's environment (which he offers in his epilogue in Ch. 21), the present analysis focuses on Ch. 18, the internal transformative capacity of "unresponsive" societies. Ultimately, external factors are, of course, crucial, as can be seen, for example, in the international dynamics of the Cold War, in the derivative and dependent character of Eastern European societies and their paralysis until Gorbachev gave the green light, and now in the ample advice though meager resources which the West is offering Eastern Europe.

#### *Responsiveness, Flexibility, and Transformative Capacity*

"A society's degree of responsiveness to the changing needs of all of its members," Etzioni (1968: 503) argues, "significantly affects its capacity to realize most societal values and to reduce alienation in the process." In the theory of societal guidance outlining the nature of the "active society," responsiveness is a complex concept that includes an egalitarian distribution of resources, their successful conversion into broadly participative political power, effective decisionmaking and control centers that issue creative responses to incoming messages communicating member's needs, and a process of authentic consensus formation. Authentic consensus, in turn, is a nested combination of a Rousseauian "general will" embodying holistic societal values, and a pluralistic range of interest groups or sub-societal wills. Responsiveness is thus closely tied to an egalitarian structure of society and can, in the ideal case, be expected to be institutionalized in the form of a liberal democratic society.

The concept of flexibility is part of the overall notion of responsiveness of a social system, but it is additionally intended to capture the specific characteristics of the society's "political shell," i.e., the administrative patterns of the



state, the constitution, and the organs of political representation. I assume that the legal and judicial system is included under the constitution and, thus, under the "political shell," but this is not made explicit. Systems theory would include the law under the integrative subsystem, not the political one. Regardless of its place, however, the law is given short shrift both as a medium and as an institution. Etzioni's political focus implies that a society may have a flexible decisionmaking mechanism and an effective control structure, but it may structurally still be somewhat rigid and under-responsive, or else, over-responsive, as highly pluralistic, unequal, fragmented and, hence, potentially drifting democracies sometimes are. The active society is both creatively responsive (i.e. responsive in a non-routine way), it is egalitarian, and it is socially and politically highly flexible, thus making for authentic consensus formation. To use a more contemporary vocabulary, all kinds of social structures such as markets, hierarchies, networks, and democratic interest associations have a place in the active society. They play a role in its viability and lend it a degree of transformative capacity that goes beyond that of the typical Western democracy. For example, in the 1960s, only Sweden and Israel, according to Etzioni, had relatively strong, consensually integrated states, thus qualifying as semi-active societies.

A number of hypotheses can be derived from these ideas, although the concepts are complex, overlapping, and analytically not independent of each other. It is, therefore, difficult to formulate precise, testable propositions that are not simply true by definition, since both the concepts and their logical interconnections leave considerable room for indeterminacy. Of course, indeterminacy is the watchword of the new philosophy of social science and does not necessarily have a negative connotation in these post-modern times.

Consider, for example, the following statements:

- (1) Underresponsiveness (of the overlaying control structure) to the member's needs will result in a system's being either too rigid (conservative) or too creative (radical); if underresponsiveness is considerable or accumulative, it will

generate more resistance or alienation than can be "tolerated" by the elites involved, the particular societal structure, or even the integrative bonds of the system (Etzioni, 1968: 504).

For the case of the Stalinist Soviet Union, for example, one could interpret this to mean that underresponsiveness was considerable and cumulative and did lead to a rigid system; but there is no evidence that it led to more resistance or alienation than could be tolerated by the system, unless one interprets Stalin's policy of liquidation of wealthy farmers resisting collectivization or his intermittent repression of real or imagined political opponents as system breakdown.

- (2) Consensus is produced in systems which vary considerably in their degree of responsiveness. When responsiveness is inadequate, consensus-building will be inauthentic because the members to whom it is not responsive will not be committed to it. When responsiveness is adequate... consensus is authentic (505).

This statement is more like a definition than a hypothesis; but even so, assuming that responsiveness was inadequate or highly selective under Stalinism, what evidence is there that consensus-building (or consensus itself) was inauthentic? Even if one assumes a degree of "mechanical solidarity" in the revolutionary phase of Soviet state socialism, the state, again by definition, "is powerful and the member collectivities are weak" (520), making for a "highly unresponsive constellation." But, one may ask, did the revolutionary movement, led by party and state, not play a normatively integrative role within the Soviet social system, and did Stalin not enjoy considerable, even charismatic popularity after the defeat of German fascism?

It seems that, at least empirically and perhaps conceptually as well, the question of authentic or inauthentic consensus is not easily decidable. Etzioni is, of course, aware of the potential normative and empirical interpenetration of state and society under state socialism. Such a possibility, however, would undermine the concept of "responsiveness" of the political overlayer, the state, to the civil society since

state and society, although analytically distinct, would be structurally and normatively integrated. Etzioni writes:

A key question for this line of analysis is difficult to answer because the data are incomplete or contested: To what degree do the controlling overlayers of non-democratic societies constitute a fusion of some member collectivities and state organizations, and to what degree do they constitute the overpowering of the society by the political overlayer itself? (521).

There is no direct answer given to this question, but Etzioni suggests elsewhere that, at least in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union and the East European societies, there is something like a maturation process in which totalitarian societies develop some minimal consensus-formation structures, even though system needs have priority over the needs of members (523-24). A totalitarian system, Etzioni argues, "relies more on a mixture of normative and coercive power and less on utilitarian power than the capitalist democratic one" (524). Normative power, however, by definition includes an element of authentic consensus, or else it would be merely a variant of coercive power, or at best propaganda, i.e. persuasion rather than education.

A related proposition states:

- (3) The less authentic the consensus, the less likely societal guidance is to activate (505).

Unless the notion of societal guidance is, again by definition, restricted to active societies, one cannot deny that state socialist guidance was highly activated and, as far as industrialization and even modernization was concerned, that it was fairly successful even in the eyes of Western observers. However, Etzioni would defend his thesis by saying that socialist societies were not societally guided, but overmanaged, reflecting, in turn, deficient or inauthentic consensus formation (523).

As a final example after a discussion of political and societal flexibility and rigidity, we read:

- (4) Both kinds of rigidity, especially the political kind, lead to revolutions. Flexibility coupled with underresponsiveness

leads to a variety of societal "pathologies," since those who are weak but excluded cannot rebel (506).

There is no doubt that the Stalinist Soviet Union was politically highly rigid, but it did not lead to revolutions. It is true, however, that "social pathologies" tended to develop due, in part to Stalinist repression itself, in part to the structural contradictions within the socialist economy, state, and society: the planning system generated untold problems of guidance, and the spying on and repression of "the people" by their own party and its security apparatus proved to be an ideologically untenable case of unresponsiveness. Still, there was no revolution, only intermittent dissent and opposition, protests and revolts (on a more recurrent basis mainly in Poland), and the pathologies were certainly not due to political flexibility.

These examples must suffice to show the tremendous complexity and near-indeterminacy of any proposition one might wish to advance toward explaining the transformation of unresponsive societies. The Soviet Union was surely not a responsive society, yet it did intermittently transform itself by attempts at de-Stalinization and, in 1985 under Gorbachev, began to move toward dismantling its most repressive features and hegemonic claims.

Interestingly, already in 1968 did Etzioni see evidence of some measure of activist transformation and liberalization. Taking the mounting unresponsiveness and coercion of Nazi Germany as a totalitarian baseline, he writes:

The Soviet Union seems to be moving in the opposite direction, toward some reduction of power of the Party-State and some increase in the autonomy of member collectivities. An indication of this trend is some increase in direct societal interaction (e.g., by labor-management, the intellectuals), though this still occurs largely within a fairly tight Party-State context. There is also some increase in responsiveness and some decrease in the reliance on coercion. These trends fluctuate, but their long-run direction seems clear (521).

These words were presumably written before the violent repression of Dubcek's reforms by Brezhnev in Prague, August 1968, and their



optimism did not anticipate another 20 years of harsh policies in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. But the vision suggests a strong affinity with the theory of convergence of industrializing social systems, which had emerged in American sovietology and social science in the 1960s. The idea of a possible convergence was shared, on the left, by Isaac Deutscher, E.H.Carr, and the "revisionist" historians as well as by Talcott Parsons (*The System of Modern Societies, 1971*), Daniel Bell (see, e.g. the "end of ideology" and the "axial principles"), and, of course, Amitai Etzioni himself. Ironically, it was Brezhnev's new Soviet constitution of 1971 that is now seen as the formal and final step toward de-Stalinization (e.g. Sharlet, 1992), but it would take another decade and a half before glasnost and perestroika initiated the final phase of the Soviet empire.

As we have seen, the analysis of Soviet Communism and its most repressive satellites, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, poses a number of problems for the applicability of Etzioni's framework to these cases. Clearly, they were politically rigid and unresponsive systems, yet there is evidence of some transformative capacity. Etzioni acknowledges the existence of movement and change, but ascribes it to an (unexplained) transition from an early revolutionary (charismatic?) and post-revolutionary stage to a later, presumably more mature (routinized, institutionalized?) stage. Even the fluctuations are mentioned which I believe are far more important than has been recognized so far, because they point toward experimentation, diffusion, and selective adoption of economic and political innovations in the always uncertain shadow of hegemonic power. Etzioni comments as follows:

The lack of responsiveness of the Party-State is revealed in the high number of new programs which the members (especially significant segments of the peasantry, ethnic minorities, religious groupings and the intelligentsia) do not support and in the high reliance on coercion against those who do not share in the revolutionary movement (520).

Obviously, the "high number of new programs" can also be interpreted as responsiveness, albeit misguided and inadequate.

On the whole, then, the analysis of Soviet self-transformation does not seem to originate from, or jive with, the conceptual apparatus, and it stops short of a theoretical explanation, revealing the notorious weakness of systems theory in dealing with social change. Concepts like maturation, mutual approximation, and convergence suggest the influence of an evolutionary and largely a-historical model. But there is another reason why there seem to be conceptual and theoretical tensions in the analysis: the influence of the theory (or rather the concept) of totalitarianism, as it had been developed in the 1950s by Carl Friedrich (1954), Karl Deutsch (1954), Zbigniew Brzezinski (1970) and, of course, Hannah Arendt (1956).

### *The Idea of Totalitarianism*

The concept of totalitarianism rested on a categorical distinction between liberal-democratic societies, on the one hand, and both national socialist and state socialist societies, on the other. Besides constant mass mobilization as a form of symbolic politics, the central phenomenon is the one-party state, its claim to total ideological and political dominance, and its attempted penetration of all social institutions as well as of language, culture, and the structure of consciousness. A typical structural characteristic is the duplication of all important governmental and administrative functions, levels, and positions by the party (a condition not to be confused with Fraenkel's "dual state", to be discussed below). The goal of total political coordination and control thus refers not only to the abolition of democratic institutions such as competing political parties, a multi-party or pluralistic parliament, the protection of individual civil and human rights, the separation of powers and the judicial review of the constitutionality of governmental and administrative decisions, and a free press. Totalitarian control also implies systematic propaganda, a secret police apparatus, political control of information and of processes of socialization and education, and, of course, the violent and unappealable repression of deviance, critique, and opposition.

Totalitarianism theory generally emphasizes the structural similarities among different types of totalitarianism and downplays any ideological

differences. For example, K. D. Bracher (1978: 118) lists the following seven structural characteristics: (1) methods of political struggle involve violence, whether open or cloaked in pseudo-legality, (2) there is an exclusive claim on truth and the right to govern, (3) ideologies have a monolithic character, (4) there is a promise of total solutions to all problems, (5) the destruction of the individual as a person and the rise of the fiction of a "new man" who, fully coordinated, fuses with community and society, (6) the chimera of total liberation brought about by the total identity of the governed and the government, citizen and party, people and leadership, and (7) the fundamental denial of free criticism and opposition.

From its beginnings in the 1950s, however, two important variants of totalitarian politics were recognized. Under Nazi totalitarianism, the party ideology centers on nationalism and racism, leading to the persecution, repression, and extermination of ethnic and religious minorities, whereas under state socialist totalitarianism, the focus is on the unifying function of the state, the political planning and control of the economy, and the repression of particular social classes. In both cases, the legal system is identified with the party-state and thus politicized. But while law is practically eliminated or used for purposes of planning and administrative guidance under state socialism, under national socialism it is instrumentalized selectively for nationalist and racist purposes. In times of war, these totalitarian methods of domination tend to become more coercive and extreme.

Five well-known criticisms of the totalitarianism concept are that it is politically inspired rather than theoretically embedded, that it is global and unspecific, that it fails to distinguish adequately among the contents of different ideological claims, that it constructs a reified image of systematic repression as static, thus ignoring stages and historical phases of development and transformation, and that it does not fully capture the contradictory (both "normal" and abnormal) realities of everyday life, from Kafka's alienation in the penal colony, Orwell's doublepeak, and Foucault's constant power and surveillance to Adorno's jargon of authenticity, artificial negativity, and strategy of hibernation as well as Goffman's strategies of adaptation to

total institutions such as inner emigration, silent resistance, colonization, and psychic segmentation, segregation, and dissociation. While most totalitarianism theorists correctly emphasized the increasing brutality of the German version, only a few saw the "cracks in the monolith" (Karl Deutsch, 1954) or acknowledged a process of Soviet "detotalitarianization" after 1956 (Hannah Arendt, 1956; see also Gleason, 1995). Right-wing concepts of totalitarianism continued to focus on the Soviet Union and betrayed a Manichean Cold War mentality. Thirty years later, this thinking culminated in President Reagan's demonization of the Soviet Union as "the evil empire."

I want to emphasize here, that I consider Etzioni's *The Active Society* as an attempt to transcend these conceptual and normative limitations inherent in the notion of totalitarianism: it involves a tripartite, even multiple rather than dichotomous categorization, it recognizes stages or at least a process of maturation, even active transformation, and it does not deny the need to distinguish the more universalistic claims of socialism from fascist particularism. Nevertheless, there are remnants of the notion of totalitarianism as a particular type of social system.

#### *The Transformative Capacity of Liberal Communism*

A look at Hungary and Poland, in contrast to hard-core Stalinism and perhaps Romania's Ceausescu, suggests that the concepts of responsiveness and political flexibility, if they are uncoupled from the state-society distinction inherent in "political shell" vs. "social structure," are useful for describing and interpreting the totally different paths these countries took before and after 1989. Etzioni himself gives a clue without, however, distinguishing between liberal and hard-core communism. He writes:

"East European Socialist Republics varied in the degree to which they allowed the Party-State to neutralize the power of the collectivities and their organizations. For instance, the church (and probably the peasantry) in Poland was never as weak as it was in the Soviet Union (fn.23). The same general trend seems to be operating in these republics. China



seems not to have reached this stage yet, or had entered it (between 1949 and 1956) but left it again, drawing on sweeping drives to maintain 'the superiority of politics,' i.e. the Party-State (fn.24). The decrease in the overbearing power of the state and the limited increase in the autonomy of the members move these societies in the direction of a responsive society" (521).

Etzioni's own footnote to this "convergence"-oriented generalization is instructive:

"A comment on the approach followed here is necessary. The proposition that is explored is that changes in the two dimensions of power distribution we discuss co-vary with changes in the responsiveness of the societal guidance mechanism. It is not suggested that the concrete changes in the societies to which we refer or their analytic attributes can be exhausted by this two-variable sub-model" (521).

This is an enormous qualification, reminiscent of Parsons' repeated insistence that his social system model is conceptual, not empirical. In other words, the two dimensions of power distribution — among the member collectivities and between them and the state — are logically, not empirically linked to the proposition that "the more egalitarian the distribution of power among them (the member collectivities), the more responsive the overlayer will tend to be to their needs" (518-19).

This proposition may initially appear to be less relevant to a state-socialist society, where differences and conflicts among structural interests are denied or repressed as a matter of socialist ideology and state policy, and where severe economic and structural inequality persists or has emerged after 1989. Nevertheless, for the case of Poland, Etzioni is right in pointing to the relative autonomy of the Catholic Church and of the smallholding peasantry who never accepted the Stalinist collectivization policies between 1945 and 1956 (fn.23). Collectivization did occur in the former German territories, in part due to displaced populations from Eastern Poland and the Ukraine. In hindsight, of course, one must add to the Church and the Catholic peasantry two further elements: the cir-

cle of intellectuals around KOR, and the industrial unions, both of whom provided the political energy for Solidarnosz as a mass movement. Polish national communism was, therefore, more responsive to these constituencies than was the case elsewhere, and the state, perhaps more under Gierek than Gomulka, was more flexible in exploring alternatives, even to the point of Jaruzelski's relatively brief military repression of Solidarnosz from within in order to forestall a repetition of Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968.

The negotiated transition in 1989 contained a number of informal agreements, pacts, and deals which set the stage for a version of consensual politics. Although Poland continues to face enormous economic difficulties and is currently governed by a socialist dominated coalition, it appears to be moving out of the transition crisis by slowly expanding the private sector and limiting the role of the state as well as social spending.

Hungary, by contrast, although counted here as a case of liberal communism, based its path toward self-transformation on a different set of historical experiences and institutional conditions. While all State Socialist societies experimented with economic reforms, Hungary went beyond the policy stage and put them into practice in the form of an underground, informal, or "second economy" of small businesses and private ownership. Two kinds of political flexibility were crucial for this development: the politics of conciliation and appeasement which Kádár initiated shortly after the 1956 occupation of Budapest and the death of the "liberal" communist leader Imre Nagy; and the continuity (or resuscitation) of some version of property law and contract law around 1970. There was also a strong element of increasingly open criticism of state socialism by a rather powerful intellectual elite. Unlike in Poland, however, this elite did not ally itself with industrial unions, but continued to play an oppositional role until it participated successfully in the final roundtable negotiations of 1989 and formed the core of the main opposition party after the transition. Many observers see the Hungarian transition as an entirely legal one, i.e. a transformative reform within a legal framework. The gradualist politics of Kádárism as well as of the post-1989

center-right Hungarian Forum thus mark Hungary as the show case of continuous self-transformation. Ironically, the current economic stagnation and political insecurity, which returned a socialist-dominated coalition to power, may be a consequence of precisely this gradualism and continuity.

### *The Dual State as a Structural Variable*

Following Nettl's idea of "the state as a conceptual variable," I want to comment briefly on the issue of the continuity of the legal system because it relates to Ernest Fraenkel's theory of the dual state which he applied to another totalitarian society, namely German fascism.

According to Fraenkel, the peculiarity of fascism consists in the fact that it combines the formal rationality of law with the irrationality of a totalitarian state. This duality corresponds to his distinction between the normative state based on liberal legality and the prerogative state based on arbitrary political measures. The combination of both elements in the dual state lent German fascism its contradictory, even schizoid character: an obsession with the appearance of legality while insisting on the political prerogative of a nationalist and racist state policy. The legal protection of non-Jewish property and freedom of contract up to the war (1933-38) was based on the continuous operation of a capitalist economy and its legal framework. The increasing economic concentration and a planned war economy, however, began to subvert the remnants of the hated liberal-capitalist order and legality (1938-45) and soon destroyed it completely.

Conceptualizing the dual state as a structural variable implies a variability in either its normative or its prerogative dimension, or both. In the case of German fascism, the normative element persisted to a certain extent in the transition from Weimar through the first five years of the Hitler regime, but then faded away or was overshadowed by the increasingly virulent prerogative dimension and the mutual affinity of government and big business. The prerogative element was put in place by the declaration of a state of emergency and exception in early 1933, the political instrumentalization of the ju-

diary and the "unlimited interpretation" of general clauses, and the adoption of specific anti-Semitic "legislation."

But it is also conceivable for a polity to have a strong prerogative dimension and a weak or absent normative dimension at the beginning (e.g., Stalinist state socialism), with both some degree of legality and more moderate forms of political rule growing over time, as in post-Stalinist and liberal Communist regimes. Finally, it is possible, indeed likely, that within a perfectly stable normative state, political prerogatives grow under the auspices of an expanding executive branch, unaccountable intelligence operations, and a foreign and military policy increasingly uncoupled from parliamentary or congressional approval. In other words, the normativity of law and the facticity of political decisionmaking and *realpolitik* can vary independently of each other. This is what seems to have happened increasingly during the course of the 20th century even in democratic polities such as the United States.

Applying Fraenkel's thesis to state socialist systems permits a new interpretation of Etzioni's theory of the transformation of unresponsive societies. The general policy stance of state socialism implies the abolition of private property and of the legal framework protecting property and contract. It also implies the abolition, or at least the political guardianship over administrative law so as to prevent courts from limiting the power and prerogative of the executive. But this policy was not radically implemented everywhere in the Soviet orbit. In the Soviet Union, all land was appropriated by the state and forced collectivization destroyed much of the landed peasantry and, of course, the aristocracy. In Poland, as noted, collectivization was not successful among the Polish peasants and was implemented only where indigenous peasant resistance was weak or non-existent. In Hungary, post-1956 Kádárism permitted a degree of private business ownership as well as the development of legal contractual relations. While the informal, second economy tended to provide the opportunity for double employment perhaps more so than true private ownership and entrepreneurship, there was a degree of flexibility and responsiveness from about 1968-70 on that was fairly unique



among socialist economies and societies.

The same responsiveness and flexibility did not obtain in Czechoslovakia after 1968, when Husak took over, and even less so in East Germany under the hard-liner Ulbricht, who was replaced by the more flexible Honecker in 1971, supposedly at Brezhnev's behest. It is true that some private business, especially in crafts and skilled occupations, continued to exist in both countries. It is also true that in East Germany, Honecker's rule from 1971 to 1989 was marked by a certain clientelism and patronage, i.e. a selective, even arbitrary "responsiveness" especially vis-a-vis the largely co-opted intellectual elite, an important contrast to Hungary and Poland. But both Czechoslovakia and East Germany had rigid cadres and an inflexible political line, which in East Germany was aggravated by a decided orthodoxy and nationalist arrogance vis-a-vis the "revisionist" reform efforts of the rest of East Central Europe.<sup>2</sup>

#### *The Active Society and the Role of Law and State*

The distinction between the hard-liners and the liberals and between repressive and liberal stages of development among state socialist societies permits us to treat "dual stateness" as a variable and to show, that Fraenkel's thesis can be extended to liberal communism, but not to the most extreme forms of Stalinist state socialism. By the same token, Etzioni's concepts of responsiveness and flexibility assume a certain face validity because they show that whereas all state socialist systems attempted to transform themselves within certain limits, the liberal ones were more successful in doing so. Ironically, their success at gradual and continuous transformation and de-Stalinization before 1989 became a liability after the transition. While the former East Germany and the Czech Republic went through a fairly drastic process of lustration and political purification, Hungary, Poland, and Russia continue to labor under the incumbency of the old cadres and the institutional continuity of economic and political practices from before the transition. The large size of the only reluctantly shrinking state-owned or state-controlled sector relative to the only slowly growing private sector in these socie-

ties is another indicator of the fact that their transformative capacities as socialist societies (i.e. before 1989) may have been greater than their corresponding capacity to change as democratic reform societies after 1989, a small, though unfortunate tribute to Etzioni's concept of activism.

How, then, do we answer Etzioni's provocative question as to the transformative capacity of unresponsive societies? Nobody could assume or anticipate in the 1960s that the Soviet Union and its East European satellites would attempt to make the transition to capitalist democracies a quarter century later. Therefore, Etzioni's 1968 speculation that mature totalitarian systems might actually be in a position to skip the democratic stage and become active societies is a moot point. Nevertheless, Etzioni saw the transformative potential of state socialism precisely in the fact that it already had a fairly autonomous overlayer and that a "medium amount" of concentration of political power "would make it more responsive than either a low or a high degree" (519). Therefore, while societal responsiveness had to be increased greatly, a transformation would require "only a limited reduction in the scope of control" (524). Furthermore, a successful transition would "entail a return to some of the features of the social movement society, i.e. a high level of activation, commitment, and participation of the members" (525). Etzioni argues:

Mature totalitarian societies, by despecifying their over-prescriptive controlling overlayer and by segregating their consensus-formation processes, may increase the normative and nonbureaucratic elements of their political organization; this allows for a more social-movement-like society (525).

Thus, a combination of increasing social differentiation and a high level of continued effort, investment, and attention approaching a "permanent revolution" might have done the trick. This constellation of factors might also help to distinguish between Gorbachev's vision (which Etzioni's analysis seems to anticipate) and the post-Communist, but sluggish and drifting "demokratura" that characterizes Yeltsin's rule.<sup>3</sup> But, generally, East Central European reform democracies do seem to operate under a

among socialist economies and societies.

The same responsiveness and flexibility did not obtain in Czechoslovakia after 1968, when Husak took over, and even less so in East Germany under the hard-liner Ulbricht, who was replaced by the more flexible Honecker in 1971, supposedly at Brezhnev's behest. It is true that some private business, especially in crafts and skilled occupations, continued to exist in both countries. It is also true that in East Germany, Honecker's rule from 1971 to 1989 was marked by a certain clientilism and patronage, i.e. a selective, even arbitrary "responsiveness" especially vis-a-vis the largely co-opted intellectual elite, an important contrast to Hungary and Poland. But both Czechoslovakia and East Germany had rigid cadres and an inflexible political line, which in East Germany was aggravated by a decided orthodoxy and nationalist arrogance vis-a-vis the "revisionist" reform efforts of the rest of East Central Europe.<sup>2</sup>

#### *The Active Society and the Role of Law and State*

The distinction between the hard-liners and the liberals and between repressive and liberal stages of development among state socialist societies permits us to treat "dual stateness" as a variable and to show, that Fraenkel's thesis can be extended to liberal communism, but not to the most extreme forms of Stalinist state socialism. By the same token, Etzioni's concepts of responsiveness and flexibility assume a certain face validity because they show that whereas all state socialist systems attempted to transform themselves within certain limits, the liberal ones were more successful in doing so. Ironically, their success at gradual and continuous transformation and de-Stalinization before 1989 became a liability after the transition. While the former East Germany and the Czech Republic went through a fairly drastic process of lustration and political purification, Hungary, Poland, and Russia continue to labor under the incumbency of the old cadres and the institutional continuity of economic and political practices from before the transition. The large size of the only reluctantly shrinking state-owned or state-controlled sector relative to the only slowly growing private sector in these socie-

ties is another indicator of the fact that their transformative capacities as socialist societies (i.e. before 1989) may have been greater than their corresponding capacity to change as democratic reform societies after 1989, a small, though unfortunate tribute to Etzioni's concept of activism.

How, then, do we answer Etzioni's provocative question as to the transformative capacity of unresponsive societies? Nobody could assume or anticipate in the 1960s that the Soviet Union and its East European satellites would attempt to make the transition to capitalist democracies a quarter century later. Therefore, Etzioni's 1968 speculation that mature totalitarian systems might actually be in a position to skip the democratic stage and become active societies is a moot point. Nevertheless, Etzioni saw the transformative potential of state socialism precisely in the fact that it already had a fairly autonomous overlay and that a "medium amount" of concentration of political power "would make it more responsive than either a low or a high degree" (519). Therefore, while societal responsiveness had to be increased greatly, a transformation would require "only a limited reduction in the scope of control" (524). Furthermore, a successful transition would "entail a return to some of the features of the social movement society, i.e. a high level of activation, commitment, and participation of the members" (525). Etzioni argues:

Mature totalitarian societies, by despecifying their over-prescriptive controlling overlay and by segregating their consensus-formation processes, may increase the normative and nonbureaucratic elements of their political organization; this allows for a more social-movement-like society (525).

Thus, a combination of increasing social differentiation and a high level of continued effort, investment, and attention approaching a "permanent revolution" might have done the trick. This constellation of factors might also help to distinguish between Gorbachev's vision (which Etzioni's analysis seems to anticipate) and the post-Communist, but sluggish and drifting "demokratura" that characterizes Yeltsin's rule.<sup>3</sup> But, generally, East Central European reform democracies do seem to operate under a



the constitution (the Basic Law) to the former German Democratic Republic.

In the current transition of most of the other East Central European societies, law does not seem to play a central role. True, there are now legal guarantees of property and contract which seems to support Max Weber's argument for the role of formal law in capitalist development. Yet while the imperative to privatize is certainly alive, it is state-guided economic policy that seems to provide a frame for law and justice rather than the other way around.

### Conclusion

I close by noting that while the great thought experiment of Etzioni's *The Active Society* may have been touched by the cold war mentality of the theory of totalitarianism, it specifies, elaborates, and ultimately transcends that theory. It does so by developing a more neutral, differentiated, and realistic conceptual framework for thinking about the political transformation of modern dictatorships. I believe it also helps to clarify some of the hopes as well as some of the disappointments that surround the fateful transitions of 1989. Thus, the largely utopian vision of a truly active society remains an important challenge for the social sciences and socio-economics, both at the level of theory and empirical analysis and at the level of policy making. From this perspective, Amitai Etzioni's ideas from over a quarter century ago have both relevance and validity as well as an infectious intellectual vibrance.

### Notes

1. This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Washington D.C., August 18, 1995. The author would like to thank Murray Milner, Ed Lehman and Dennis Wrong

for their helpful comments on the original draft of this paper.

2. There were also particular personal and nationalist animosities between Germans, Poles, and Russians, as epitomized by the following story from the height of Solidarnosc in 1981: An American reporter interviews a Polish citizen in Warsaw. "You are surrounded by hostile forces," the interviewer says, "the Russians are poised in the East and the East Germans in the West. If they invade Poland to put down Solidarnosc, whom are you going to kill first?" Without hesitating, the Pole answers: "The Germans. Duty before pleasure!"
3. The term comes from Ferencz Miszlivetz (1994), and refers to the persistence of non-democratic practices in formally democratic institutions in Eastern Europe.

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