

children—the kids who are the prime victims of poverty, along with their young mothers—must be made to support their children. (Haveman agrees. Liberals apparently are ready for a national tax-based system for finding and dunning fathers who are delinquent on child support.) For the healthy non-elderly, Ellwood suggests that government limit public assistance to 18–36 months. After that, it should “provide minimum-wage jobs.” The cost? “Over \$20 billion or even \$30 billion to do everything right.”

While Ellwood offers a cogent summary of the changing demographic and gender characteristics of the poor, Haveman is interested in the general picture of income distribution. His analysis of trends during the Reagan years, though not news, is sobering. “The economic tide turned against youth in general,” he summarizes, and other big losers have been single mothers. Income and wealth shifted steadily toward the elderly, who make no more economic contribution, and away from the young who are the nation’s economic future.

Haveman’s program resembles Ellwood’s: refundable tax credits to take the poor entirely out of the tax system; child-care subsidies; the withholding of wages from fathers delinquent in child care; the creation of a “capital account for youths,” a grant of \$20,000 to all needy 18-year-olds, to be used for education and medical

services, according to the recipient’s choice. The cost? Roughly \$20 billion, the same figure Ellwood uses.

These are all wise suggestions for welfare reform. Words like “responsibility” and “self-sufficiency” register a healthy change in the liberal vocabulary, once limited to such ideals as “justice” and “security.” But welfare policy supporters have only begun the necessary rethinking. Both books avoid volatile ethnic questions, particularly the challenge posed by new Asian and Hispanic populations. Both authors confront the issue of socially and parentally unwanted births but ignore the controversy over birth control.

Most fatal to their hopes for effective reform, however, is their parochial view of American society. They ignore international economic and demographic factors. Immigration, for instance, not only shapes the U.S. labor market but can produce unintended consequences. Imagine the impact in the Caribbean or Mexico of news of the adoption of Haveman’s \$20,000 “universal personal account for youths.” (And surely, the courts would rule illegal aliens eligible for such grants.) A major influx of immigrants would overwhelm America’s puny barriers, teaching a costly lesson that welfare reforms must be connected to other elements, including secure borders. Such tough trade-offs remain the ultimate liberal conundrum.

—Otis Graham, '83

Empire in Decay

RETURN TO DIVERSITY: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II. By Joseph Rothschild. Oxford, 1989. 257 pp. \$24.95

As Soviet troops advanced into Europe during World War II, the Hungarian historian Gyula Szeku calmly observed: “We are to wait half a century before any real change occurs in Eastern Europe.”

Ahead of schedule by a few years, that change is already the subject of a numerous articles (including those by Timothy Garton-Ash in *The New York Review of Books* and William Pfaff in the *New Yorker*) and now a book-length study. In this, the first comprehensive political history of the Soviet empire in decay, Rothschild, a professor of political science at Columbia, tells a story of disintegration

and chaos.

The Soviet empire in Eastern Europe is indeed crumbling, but few of the causes are new. Economic failure, social unrest, and police brutality have all been part of life in Eastern Europe since Stalin's death in 1953. Similarly, ideological deviation of individual countries from the Soviet model is almost as old as the communist regimes themselves.

What is new in Eastern Europe belongs not so much to the sphere of economic or social reform as to the domain of psychology—the psychology of politics. The novelty in this era is the responses of the individual countries to Moscow's moral and ideological crisis. Never before have Eastern Europe's ruling elites admitted so openly to their loss of legitimacy as members of an imperial communist elite. Never before have Eastern Europe's leaders, from Czechoslovakia's Gustáv Husák to Romania's Nicolae Ceaușescu, made such desperate, ad hoc attempts to justify their positions by dredging up pre-communist and nonrevolutionary traditions and notions. Faced with these new developments, we need new concepts. And that is what Rothschild provides: a framework for understanding change in Eastern Europe.

Despite outward appearances, Stalin's effort to homogenize the Eastern European nation-states failed in one crucial aspect: It did not lead to the creation of a region-wide political culture. If Soviet domination was initially enforced through uniformity (notably, by way of police terror and single-party rule), the current return to national diversity represents a "revenge of the repressed." The loosening of Moscow's control during the 1980s has so far led not to reform but to disintegration. As a result, life in individual countries of the Soviet bloc could now hardly be more varied. In Romania, police arrest would-be entrepreneurs for selling potatoes to neighboring municipalities, while in Hungary increasing amounts of government and private capital is raised on the Budapest stock exchange. While Czechoslovakia's few political dissenters spend more time in prison than on the streets, in Po-

land millions participate in organized anti-government activities.

But, as Rothschild shows, diversity in Eastern Europe is not merely a reaction to Soviet imperial uniformity. It is also an assertion of age-old differences, rivalry, and even open hostility among the individual countries of the region. By conquering Eastern Europe, the Soviets inherited a region of small, vulnerable nations, some of which (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Poland) looked back on no more than three decades of modern statehood. The Treaty of Versailles (1919), creating new boundaries and recreating many small states, helped to exacerbate ethnic and economic tensions. Furthermore, as Rothschild demonstrated in his earlier *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars* (1974), "nationalization" in Eastern Europe tended to produce authoritarian regimes rather than parliamentary democracies. And this region-wide political culture changed very little under Pax Sovietica after World War II; it was simply forced to exist beneath the surface.

Whether the current changes represent nothing more than a resurfacing of the repressed past remains to be seen. But Rothschild's account of four decades of communism makes one thing clear: The release of local communist regimes from Soviet domination does not necessarily lead to democracy. Consider Yugoslavia, the only communist country with decades of effective independence from Moscow. Despite many liberal features of this regime, the barriers to full democracy (i.e. single-party rule, press restrictions) have long been internally rather than externally imposed. And in another part of the region, Romania's claim to its own "national road" to communism sustains the most repressive and enduring dictatorship in the region.

The oppressed peoples of the eroding Soviet empire now invoke the interwar decades as the last "period of independence, sovereignty, and dignity." But doing so, they also invoke the troubling and even ugly features of that time. One ironic con-

sequence of this appeal to the past is that it brings out continuities between the dictatorial regimes of the present and the authoritarian regimes of the interwar period. Thus it appears that history may provide a new source of legitimacy for illiberal, antidemocratic leaders—and, as Rothschild argues, it is already doing so.

Of course, there is no way of knowing whether this perverse use of the past will finally prevail. And events in Poland provide a hopeful counter-model. There, millions of citizens have repeatedly demonstrated in support not only of national sovereignty but also of freedom from repression, arbitrary one-party rule, and unchecked government power.

Such popular movements lead me to resist Rothschild's gloomiest forecasts. If

politics were restricted to official goings-on, then I would be convinced that current developments in most of Eastern Europe signal a return to the severely limited political life of the 1930s, with ritualistic mass plebiscites and elections ("whose outcomes are known in advance") as window-dressing for autocratic regimes. But the maturity of peaceful mass politics exhibited by millions of Poles is something new under the Eastern European sun. Only if movements like Solidarity fail to survive and spread, will we have cause to fear, along with Rothschild, that a repressive Soviet empire will someday be replaced only by a half-dozen smaller repressive states.

—Mária M. Kovács, '88

NEW TITLES

History

THE UNMASTERABLE PAST: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity by Charles S. Maier. Harvard, 1988. 227 pp. \$22.50

Last autumn, the speaker of the West German parliament, Phillip Jenninger, was forced to resign after failing to condemn the Holocaust in a speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Nazi's "Krystallnacht" attack on German Jews. The incident received worldwide press attention, but it was only the latest in a national controversy over German responsibility for the horrors of Hitler's Third Reich. German scholars, as Harvard historian Maier shows, have long been at the forefront of the debate. Conservative historians, among them Ernst Nolte, argue that, while the Holocaust was terrible, it was no worse than Stalin's mass-murder cam-

paigns in the Soviet Union or Pol Pot's genocide in Cambodia. Others even suggest that it was a precautionary measure: Hitler, alarmed by Stalinist purges and Jewish support for Great Britain, created Auschwitz and Treblinka in self-defense. Among leftist scholars outraged by such assertions is sociologist Jürgen Habermas. He sees in the conservative revision of German history a not-so-veiled effort to revive German nationalism (a perception acknowledged by some conservatives, including Michael Stürmer, who say that West Germany cannot be an effective member of NATO without a guilt-free national identity). The debate is not merely academic, Maier says. Waged on the editorial pages of leading German newspapers, it is bound up with domestic politics, which have grown increasingly unstable during the era of détente and declining prosperity. Maier fears that the issue, if unresolved, could even endanger the Western alliance.