
In their book *Privatizing the Police State: The Case of Poland* Maria Łoś and Andrzej Zybertowicz analyze the role of communist secret services in the evolution and eventual self-destruction of the communist system in Poland. Before them nobody had undertaken such an analysis as it is a methodologically difficult task and as moreover the stress on the role of secret services classifies an analysis as a kind conspiratorial theory and for this reason sends into the disrepute. But could one believe that communist authorities so tightly invigilating all aspects of societal life did not use secret services to influence the course of events to their benefits and to the benefits of communist *nomenklatura*? Thus a closer look at the functioning of secret services under communism could help to explain some puzzles that conventional sociological and economic analysis cannot account for.

The authors gather rich documentation and develop perceptive reasoning to support, if not prove, their deep conviction that the security apparatus has created “institutional channels and protection necessary for the Communist *nomenklatura*’s smooth and profitable withdrawal from the totalitarian order” (p. 9) and that the large part of state assets have been taken over, squeezed or directly robbed by those who acted within security networks or under their umbrella. This book is thus about covert actions and hidden networks but also about open and striking outcomes which show the overrepresentation of *nomenklatura*’s people in business and political elites of post-communist Poland — the outcome which has been well documented by scholarly research reviewed in the Łoś and Zybertowicz book. So unless one believes that the members of the communist party were all Harvard MBA graduates, the question arises about the conditions that facilitated the smooth conversion of communists into business leaders. One of such conditions, as Maria Łoś and Andrzej Zybertowicz argue, were the actions of secret services and the exploitation of bonds of “dirty togetherness” for economic benefits from the system’s transformation.

Studying influence exercised by secret services is not methodologically a simple task. The author recognize this difficulty, but encouraged by path breaking works of Gary T. Marx, hope to give substance to their claims.

The composition of the book shows the analytical logic followed by the authors. Maria Łoś and Andrzej Zybertowicz document the thesis about the importance of communist security services in the protracted agony and death of communism by arguing that in 1980s, despite widespread belief of the reformed and softened nature of the communist rule in Poland in this period, Poland was still a post-totalitarian party/police state (the birth of Solidarity social movement meant the weakening of the legitimacy of the system to which communists responded by extending military/police invigilation), that security services coordinated preparations for round table talks with moderate opposition which opened the way for the system’s peaceful transformation, that the commercialization of *nomenklatura* and security services was a premeditated strategy to prepare them economic soft landing, that round table talks created the climate of moral complicity between parts of anti-communist opposition and communist
elites and that this complicity was helped by an earlier penetration of Solidarity movement by security agents.

Although the book offers the reading of the history of Poland in the last quarter of XX century through the lenses of secret services' influence on the communist system's transformation, the authors develop also interpretative insights which help to understand special difficulties in creating the rule of law, administering justice and fighting corruption in contemporary Poland. Łoś and Zybertowicz stress (chapter 6 and especially p. 118 and further) how ex-communists supported by economic liberals stripped post-communist transformation from any moral meaning focusing the society's attention exclusively on economic hardships and economic gains. In such an amoral vision of an economy those in public offices use their powers not to implement any long-term vision of a common good, but to distribute fortunes to their friends and to themselves. Equally enlightening is the analysis of the globalization of the post-communist transformation that argues that the post-national tendencies in the contemporary world and globalization with virtualization of economies helped ex-communist to "disconnect themselves discursively from totalitarianism" (p. 203) and skillfully play the role of leaders in the internationalization of Poland and the Polish economy.

The explanation of how ex-communists so easily converted their political capital into economic benefits and then used private capital to win democratic elections and legitimize acquired wealth is centered around the notion of the privatizing the police-state. Maria Łoś and Andrzej Zybertowicz write that "Literally privatization of the state denotes exploitation of a state's institutions for private ends" [p. 154], but one might also speak, as I would prefer, about the state's capture. Privatization, as defined by Maria Łoś and Andrzej Zybertowicz, is potentially a vast phenomenon extending well beyond the legal transfer of economic assets or rights. But, and this might surprise the reader, empirical indicators of privatization chosen by the authors are limited to a) the privatization of secret files; b) the growth of private security industry; c) the active role of secret services in large scale privatization or financial schemes and d) the infiltration and manipulation of various agendas of the state.

These indicators help to explain how ex-communists and security agents have extended their influence beyond the life of a post-totalitarian party/police state. Łoś and Zybertowicz argue how important selective destruction of secret files was by showing that it was likely to help to blackmail and manipulate people in public positions to the benefit of ex-communists/secret agents. They argue that the creation of private security agencies, which outnumber the forces of the present state police, has opened space for profitable businesses of ex-secret agents and they give examples of secret agents influence behind large financial scandals related to FOZZ operations (the theft of public funds devoted to buy back parts of Poland's foreign debts) or the creation of some banks (especially BIG Bank). The examples of FOZZ and BIG Bank are, as I would like to argue, more important because of the unwillingness of ex-communists while they regained power to prosecute former nomenklatura thieves or to publicly clarify the ties between ex-communist politicians and the bank's owners than because of the economic importance of the two scandals. This is also the crux of my criticism of the book: should a reader of the book imply that secret agents influenced (How? To what degree? To whose benefit?) grand economic programs which were implemented