After the radical changes of 1989 there were many discussions about the identity of the heroes who had forced the Communist Party to resign. Although I played my own part in the successful upheaval and belonged to the circle of so-called dissidents, I brought it to the attention of my friends as early as the spring of 1990 that those who would eventually be regarded as the persons responsible for the 'revolution' would soon be considered not only as winners but possibly also as in some way to blame—both for the new problems that were likely to arise and for the forthcoming confusion. I considered the upheavals of the "year of miracles"—to quote Timothy Garton Ash—as a victory full of paradoxes. A crucial thesis of historical materialism claims that the moment the prevailing form of ownership of the means of production becomes a hindrance to the development of the productive forces the social system will necessarily collapse. Marx sought to prove this theory by pointing to the decline of slavery, feudalism, and capitalism, but he naturally could have had no idea that his model would also one day be applied to the decline of a social system he (departing from his own dialectical-materialist approach) considered eternal.

This is why this book by Ivo Možný, a sociologist from Masaryk University in Brno, caught my attention. Published in 1991 this modest work offers a rather untraditional and unheroic explanation of the fall of the communist regime.

A number of people were offended by the book. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to bring it to the attention of a wider public at the tenth anniversary of the changes. Enthusiasm and sentiment are gone, problems are clearly visible, and Ivo Možný's contemplative analysis may now perhaps be considered more acceptable. Unlike many political scientists, politicians, and journalists he does not seek to answer the question asked in the title of his book: Why So Easily?. Yes, why did the communist system fall apart both so easily and so late? What seems most important in this connection is not the Mafia, the Czech secret police, the KGB, conspiracies, co-operation with the Communist Party, or foreign policy considerations, but family networks and social capital. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the totalitarian regime suited many people perfectly well, that most citizens gained something from the system and so would in all probability come to regret its passing. Ivo Možný has been
conducting research on the sociology of the family for many decades. In this study, he narrowed his scope of explanation to the level of family relations and family clans. After an explanation of functional and institutional attitudes to the family under socialism, he proceeds to prove through a number of examples how the family—whether as a social group—successfully 'colonized' the state, how many families exchanged services rather than paid for them and drew on resources from the ‘gray’ economy. While the costs and risks were borne by the state, families and family clans profited. Ivo Možný does not have in mind merely families of top Party officials, but also ordinary families, those working in the building industry or running bars or stores with hard-to-get merchandise or who had relatives, acquaintances, or merely people who 'owed them a favor' in useful places. The socialist state became poorer and these families blossomed.

In such circumstances what motivated people to join together to instigate mass demonstrations on such a scale that the system eventually fell apart? There were only a few hundred dissidents, non-conformist writers, and open critics of the communist regime: they could not have filled up the squares on their own. Besides, according to Možný, ‘normal families’ did not support the dissidents whom they considered eccentric, idealistic, and not responsible enough to cope for their own families. Ordinary families felt that the dissidents were right, but were not so sure that “this was also their truth”. Dissident writings and broadcasts of Radio Free Europe on the subjects of freedom, truth, and human rights would not have been sufficient to bring about the upheaval.

Family networking worked fine, but many people disliked the fact that money was not enough if one wanted to get somewhere; that the ‘human factor’—social contacts, or simply connections—were always needed—and not everyone had these. Besides, one could not really take pride in one’s wealth: one was always likely to attract undesirable attention and accusations that one’s wealth had not been acquired legally; that some form of clientism had been behind acquisition. This attitude and lack of self-confidence still persists: few people willing to confess that they have become well-off. Under the previous regime was the younger generation of Party supporters who eventually came to turn against clientism. Those who had obtained a good position in the system had an opportunity to accumulate a certain amount of wealth, but were never able to enjoy it properly. In fact, they had to hide it—unless they wanted to jeopardize the positions of their fathers. This led to both dependence on the one hand, and animosity and rebellion on the other.

In the last fifteen years of socialism there was a kind of archaic economy based on friendly favors, within the framework of which money had no more practical value and was replaced by special relations and connections. The latter were becoming more and more complicated all the time and were not susceptible to mere monetary purchase. In this connection Ivo Možný cites French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who studied life and economic relations in the Kabyl tribe in Algeria. Instead of exchanging money or goods the members of this tribe would give presents to each other repeatedly; eventually they institutionalized their whole economy and became interdependent. If anyb