



Decline and Discontent: Communism and the West Today

Paul Hollander

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In this lucid and thought-provoking volume, Paul Hollander juxtaposes and examines two apparently unrelated phenomena and their possible connections: the sudden and unexpected collapse of Communist systems during the late 1980s and the less spectacular erosion of social cohesion and cultural values in the West and primarily in the United States since the late 1960s.

The first part of the book is devoted to the failures of communism, or of "existing socialism", with special reference to malfunctioning characteristics of these states, focusing on the Soviet Union and Hungary. The author also examines in a broad comparative framework the patterns of deprivation and dissatisfaction these systems generate wherever they have been established. Among the sources of dissatisfaction and loss of legitimacy the author emphasizes not only the discrepancies between theory and practice, but-unlike many other students of such systems-also the part played by the- *implementation* of Marxism-Leninism in the failures of these systems. He notes the paradox that while Western authors developed lively and detailed scenarios about the impending decline of the United States, few anticipated the crises and dramatic unravelling of Communist systems.

The second part of the volume addresses the more elusive discontents found in the West and especially, the United States, articulated by intellectuals, educators, and opinion makers. Here the author considers the possibility that a wide variety of highly personal discontents have in recent times taken social-political forms and found public expression. Specific topics in this section include the Institution for Policy Studies, an organization devoted to the production and dissemination of social criticism for over a quarter century; the hostility to Western cultural legacy and values in higher education disguised of late as "multicultural studies"; the possibility of new political pilgrimages after the attractions of Nicaragua waned; the pattern of responses and moral evasions on the Left associated with the unravelling of communism; the new antiwar movement inspired by the war with Iraq and its similarities to the antiwar movements of the Vietnam era.

Decline and Discontent will be of interest to intellectual historians, political scientists, sociologists, and all those seeking a better understanding of the complex and contradictory political and cultural trends in the 1980s and beyond.

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