**David Chroust, “Thirty Years of Velvet: The Literature in English on Revolution and Transition in the Czech Republic since 1989,” *Czech Education Foundation of Texas Newsletter* (Fall 2020).**

Thirty years have passed since Communist rule ended in the Czech Republic, and many people in Texas may want to learn more about revolution, transition and change in that country since 1989: Texans of Czech descent, students in high school and college, and people with all kinds of other interests in the Czech Republic besides ancestry and school. Czech-related organizations in Texas commemorated the thirty-year anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia—the American Friends of the Czech Republic with a November 2019 reception in the historic Casino Hall in La Grange, and the Texas Czech Genealogical Society in Caldwell and the Czech Center Museum in Houston with invited presentations in January and February 2020 from this author. The Czech Education Foundation of Texas is well suited to promote the study and understanding of the Czech Republic and its world region since the revolutions of 1989. One way to do this is to inform our readers and audiences about the literature on this subject. I set out to do this at my two presentations in early 2020, and I return to that work here. As a librarian and historian on the Texas A&M University Libraries faculty, I can search for literature and also review it for what it may contribute to our knowledge of the subject.

As a flagship public university in our state, Texas A&M also offers us a flagship academic library of several million volumes that cover all fields of knowledge. TAMU Libraries offers borrowing privileges to community users, who can also search its catalog anytime at <https://libcat.tamu.edu>. I used this catalog to search for the literature that I present here: TAMU Libraries purchases new titles so broadly that it holds most any book about the Czech Republic in any field from a university press or other academic publisher in the United States, Canada and Great Britain. So, in the TAMU Libraries catalog, we recently find, for the term “Czech Republic” in the subject headings for publications, 1,127 editions in English and published since 1990. Most of the books in this large result set are about topics not of interest to us here, such as archaeological sites, the natural environment, the arts, localities and earlier periods.

But I found 89 books here that examine revolution and change in the Czech Republic since the 1989 Velvet Revolution. This is now a working bibliography that I can expand as a resource for teaching, learning and study, offer to audiences and partners of CEFT, and use as a guide to reading and as a basis for presentations in person and online to interested audiences in Texas and around the world. We can learn about the books from reviews on various free sites online and in commercial databases, like the Book Review Digest Plus database from the H.W. Wilson company that is paid for and available on the TAMU Libraries home page at <https://library.tamu.edu> (click “Databases”) for students, faculty, staff and retirees. We can also expand the working bibliography by selecting sources from the references in these book reviews and in the books already in our bibliography.[[1]](#endnote-1)

What kinds of change in the Czech Republic do the 89 books examine? Political, economic and social are the three large and obvious categories. These categories are also ambiguous and troublesome as we try to use them to group the books, but this makes us think more deeply about and to better question change in the Czech Republic, the literature about it, and maybe even what this literature leaves unexamined.

Five of the books cover both political and economic transition: (1) *Out of the Red: Building Capitalism and Democracy in Postcommunist Europe* (published in 2001), (2) *Not Only the Market: The Role of the Market, Government, and the Civic Sector in the Development of Postcommunist Societies* (1999), (3) *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation versus State* (1997), (4) *Czechoslovakia:* *The Velvet Revolution and beyond* (2000) and (5) *The Czech Republic: A Nation of Velvet* (2000). These five books are from the perspective of around one decade after the Revolution, while *The Velvet Revolution 30 Years After* (2019) is from another two decades later. Thisbook of interviews with two philosopher dissidents (Jan Sokol and Daniel Kroupa), a student leader (Monika MacDonagh-Pajerová), and a foreign correspondent (Jolyon Naegele) is also an album of striking photographs, including portraits and documents, from the days of the Revolution.

In his *Out of the Red*, Mitchell A. Orenstein finds that after 1989, Poland and the Czech Republic achieved a “slow calibration of policies that led to the right balance between ‘economic efficiency’ and social welfare—and thus greater sociopolitical ‘cohesion’.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Orenstein is a Harvard- and Yale-educated political scientist who chairs Russian and East European Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Czech sociologist Martin Potůček at Prague’s Charles University takes a much different view in *Not Only the Market*: the book is a “critique of the neo-liberal-inspired policies of the 1992-1997 Czech government of Václav Klaus,” and Potůček wrote it in “response to President Václav Havel’s 1994 call for a ‘vision’ about the ‘choice of society’ facing the Czech Republic.” According to Potůček, the “market, state and ‘civic sector’ (voluntary organisations, civil society) are all indispensable to social development and must be made to work together through politics and public policy.”[[3]](#endnote-3) Robin H.E. Shepherd, a British Chatham House political analyst educated at the London School of Economics, makes this important point in his *Czechoslovakia:* *The Velvet Revolution and beyond*: “The revolutions were led against communism but not necessarily in favour of anything in particular.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

At the beginning of the present period was the Velvet Revolution in its narrow sense as the remarkable days of mass protest after November 17, 1989, that broke the Communist dictatorship. In *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989-1992* (2013), James Krapfl drew on “over forty archives across today’s Czech Republic and Slovakia, including a magisterial survey of local newspapers and bulletins published during the revolution,” to examine the “events of 1989-1990 as a citizen’s revolution.”[[5]](#endnote-5) But the Velvet Revolution was also a negotiated transfer of power. Can a revolution be negotiated? This paradox complicates the temptation to mythologize the Velvet Revolution, and George Lawson expands on it as he compares the Czech case with two other countries in his *Negotiated Revolutions: The Czech Republic, South Africa and Chile* (2005). John Keane looks at the main Czech revolutionary in *Václav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts* (2000). Havel was a playwright, and revolution is also theater. In our case, the main stage was Václavské náměstí (Wenceslas Square), and Michael Andrew Kukral portrays it in *Prague 1989: Theater of Revolution: A Study in Humanistic Political Geography* (1997). Also necessary to our understanding of 1989 are the *Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (2000), as Aviezer Tucker titled his contribution to Czech intellectual history in the two decades before 1989.

Seven books zoom out from the revolutionary days to longer periods, what Fernand Braudel, who changed how we think about history, called the *longue durée*. These books are important, because otherwise the Velvet Revolution might seem so swift and sweeping to us that we might forget to ask what and how much remained and continued from the times before. The book titles alone remind us to consider continuities from the past, especially *Czech Politics: From the West to East and Back Again* and *Forward to the Past? Continuity and Change in Political Development in Hungary, Austria, and the Czech and Slovak Republics*. In *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Transformation of Society* (1996), Ladislav Holý (1933-1997), an anthropologist of kinship in Africa and a Czech émigré, considers the enduring phenomenon of identity and how Czech identity passed through the first Velvet years, although a reviewer criticized him for writing about intellectuals and not about popular culture (films and television), daily life and public opinion.[[6]](#endnote-6) Conor O’Dwyer examined how “corruption, clientelism, patronage, [and] informal practices” persisted in *Runaway State-Building: Patronage Politics and Democratic Development* (2006). As a fellow scholar put it in his review of this book, “The political is personal,” and people do not simply abandon their networks of power and favor after a revolution.[[7]](#endnote-7) Jiří Přibáň also considers corruption in *The Defence of Constitutionalism: The Czech Question in Post-National Europe* (2017), where the question is whether and how the Czech Republic has or has not become the “normal country” that its free-marketeering first premier, Václav Klaus, wanted to make it.[[8]](#endnote-8) Pieter Vanhuysse, in *Divide and Pacify: Strategic Social Policies and Political Protests in Post-Communist Democracies* (2006), reminds us that the state may be new and so may the elites who run it, but they still use the state to trim opposition and to preserve power. Vanhuysse “makes an important connection,” writes a reviewer, “between the strategic allocation of welfare benefits and political consolidation of liberal market democracy—something you do not hear much about from the neo-liberals, who like to take credit for east-central Europe’s historic transformation.”[[9]](#endnote-9) *Czech Democracy in Crisis* (2020), a volume of essays from fifteen scholars, is a look at the new democracy thirty years later.

Czech integration into the European Union, which it joined in 2004, is a big outcome of the Velvet Revolution, and three books focus on it: *Czech Republic: Toward EU Accession*, which is a report from the World Bank, *Governing the Czech Republic and Slovakia: Between State Socialism and the European Union*, and the two-volume *Road to the European Union*. Another outcome was the breakup of Czechoslovakia into two ethnic states, and we can read about it in five books: (1) *Czecho/Slovakia: Ethnic Conflict, Constitutional Fissure, Negotiated Breakup*, (2) *The Break-Up of Czechoslovakia: An In-Depth Economic Analysis*, (3) *Czechoslovakia: The Short Goodbye*, (4) *Defining the Sovereign Community: the Czech and Slovak Republics*, and (5) *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Twenty Years of Independence, 1993-2013*. Czechs and Germans also remains a theme of ethnic and state relations, as we read in *Czechs and Germans, 1848-2004: The Sudeten Question and the Transformation of Central Europe* and in *Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity*. Another five books take up other aspects of the political transformation, from the local to the international, and from human rights to the environment: (1) *Regional Problems and Policies in the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic*, (2) *Local Communities and Post-Communist Transformation: Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia*, (3) *Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic in World Politics*, (4) *Human Rights and Democratization in the Czech Republic*, and (5) *Environment and Democracy in the Czech Republic: The Environmental Movement in the Transition Process*.

Five eloquent book titles suggest that second thoughts about the post-Velvet and EU transitions are a social problem worth understanding: (1) *Between Utopia and Disillusionment: A Narrative of the Political Transformation in Eastern Europe*, (2) *Velvet Retro: Postsocialist Nostalgia and the Politics of Heroism in Czech Popular Culture*, (3) *The New Right in the New Europe: Czech Transformation and Right-Wing Politics, 1989-2006*, (4) *Social Costs of Transformation to a Market Economy in Post-Socialist Countries: The Cases of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary*, and (5) *Europeanised Defiance—Czech Euroscepticism since 2004*. Reviewing Henri Vogt’s *Between Utopia and Disillusionment* in the journal *Utopian Studies*, Imre Szeman writes that in 1989 the “shape and character of [the] future society was neither clearly envisioned nor agreed upon in advance,” that revolutions come from a “utopic impulse” of “people’s dreams of a new kind of society,” and that despite the “infamous” manifesto of the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama for Western democratic capitalism as the culmination of history, “[t]hose of us who hope for different futures can only welcome a book that takes seriously the intimate relationship between everyday Utopias and the possibility of political change.”[[10]](#endnote-10)

The economic transition may lead the political transition by the volume of books and analysis devoted to it. The books that cover the subject most broadly include the following thirteen: (1) *From Central Planning to the Market: The Transformation of the Czech Economy 1989-2004*, (2) *The Czech Republic and Economic Transition in Eastern Europe*, (3) *Successful Transformations? The Creation of Market Economies in Eastern Germany and the Czech Republic*, (4) *The Rise and Fall of Czech Capitalism: Economic Development in the Czech Republic since 1989*, (5) *The Global Political Economy and Post-1989 Change: The Place of the Central European Transition*, (6) *Transition Economies*, (7) *Economies in Transition and the World Economy: Models, Forecasts and Scenarios*, (8) *The Czech Republic, 1990-1995: An Economy in Transition*, (9) *OECD Economic Surveys: The Czech and Slovak Republics*, (10) *A New Capitalist Order: Privatization & Ideology in Russia & Eastern Europe*, (11) *The Making of Economic Reform in Eastern Europe: Conversations with Leading Reformers in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic*, (12) *Current Economics and Politics of (ex-)Czechoslovakia*, and (13) *Embedded Politics: Industrial Networks and Institutional Change in Postcommunism*.

In *Embedded Politics: Industrial Networks and Institutional Change in Postcommunism* (2002), Gerald A. McDermott “describes the ‘transformation of two large industrial concerns in the mechanical engineering sector of the Czech Republic’ based on 200 interviews with firm and state actors collected from 1993 to 1995.” This makes McDermott’s book, a reviewer writes, the “best empirical description ... of enterprise change in the post-Communist Czech Republic.” McDermott shoots down the “radical antistatist ‘Washington Consensus’” approach to economic transformation that “emphasize[d] stabilization, liberalization, and privatization, and as quickly as possible ... even if that mean[t] giving away the property to owners with no additional resources, expertise, or market contacts.” The reviewer sums up the result in this scathing sentence: “Much as a vanguard had attempted to formulate Communism for a largely nonexistent working class with the application of Marxist-Leninism, a new vanguard would formulate Capitalism by applying neoclassical development theory.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

Another twenty-five books examine the economic transition in special sectors and aspects, such as banking, industry, capital markets, foreign investment, management, labor markets, real estate, food, environment, small businesses, tourism and publishing: (1) *Banking and Financial Stability in Central Europe: Integrating Transition Economies into the European Union*, (2) *Czech Republic: Completing the Transformation of Banks and Enterprises*, (3) *Industry in the Czech and Slovak Republics*, (4) *Competitiveness of Industry in the Czech Republic and Hungary*, (5) *Czech Republic: Capital Market Review*, (6) *Foreign Direct Investment in Central Eastern Europe: Case Studies of Firms in Transition*, (7) *OECD Reviews of Foreign Direct Investment: Czech Republic*, (8) *Organizational Change in Post-Communist Europe: Management and Transformation in the Czech Republic*, (9) *OECD Territorial Reviews: Czech Republic*, (10) *Doing Business with the Czech Republic*, (11) *Managing in Emerging Market Economies: Cases from the Czech and Slovak Republics*, (12) *The Entrepreneurial Shift: Americanization in European High-Technology Management Education*, (13) *Secondary Privatisation in Transition Economies: The Evolution of Enterprise Ownership in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia*, (14) *Review of the Labour Market in the Czech Republic*, (15) *Assessing Local Job Creation in the Czech Republic*, (16) *Transitions in Land and Housing: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Poland*, (17) *Food and Agriculture in the Czech Republic: From a ‘Velvet’ Transition to the Challenges of EU Accession*, (18) *Review of Agricultural Policies: Czech Republic*, (19) *The Agri-Environmental Situation and Policies in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland*, (20) *Economic Restructuring and Local Environmental Management in the Czech Republic*, (21) *Environmental Performance Reviews: Czech Republic*, (22) *The Greening of Central Europe: Sustainable Development and Environmental Policy in Poland and the Czech Republic*, (23) *Small Privatization: The Transformation of Retail Trade and Consumer Services in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland*, (24) *Tourism in Transition: Economic Change in Central Europe*, and (25) *Cold War Books in the “Other” Europe and What Came after*. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris published twelve books on the economic transition, and World Bank in Washington another six, also on the transition in public administration.

Part of both the political and economic transitions was the transition in law, justice, public administration and other institutions, like the mass media and the armed forces: (1) *Communists and Their Victims: The Quest for Justice in the Czech Republic*, (2) *Lustration and Transitional Justice: Personnel Systems in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland*, (3) *Ready for Europe: Public Administration Reform and European Accession in Central and Eastern Europe*, (4) *Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations in the Transition*, (5) *Regulatory Reform in the Czech Republic*, (6) *The Tax System in the Czech Republic*, (7) *Communism, Capitalism, and the Mass Media*, (8) *The Post-Socialist Media: What Power the West? The Changing Media Landscape in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic*, and (9) *Democratizing Communist Militaries: The Cases of the Czech and Russian Armed Forces*.

How did the Velvet Revolution change the lives of ordinary people? Only six books take up questions about the social transition, and three of these focus on gender: (1) *Czech Society in the 2000s: A Report on Socio-Economic Policies and Structures*, (2) *Social Protection in the Candidate Countries: Country Studies Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Poland*, (3) *Social, Economic and Cultural Aspects in the Dynamic Changing Process of Old Industrial Regions: Ruhr District (Germany), Upper Silesia (Poland), Ostrava Region (Czech Republic)*, (4) *Czech Feminisms: Perspectives on Gender in East Central Europe*, (5) *Market Dreams: Gender, Class, and Capitalism in the Czech Republic*, (6) *Gender, Globalization, and Postsocialism: The Czech Republic after Communism*.

But another six books, including two already mentioned above, explore the social, personal and other transitions in the Czech Lands since 1989 through oral history, interviews, public opinion research and memoir: (1) *Velvet Revolutions: An Oral History of Czech Society*, (2) *The Open Economy and Its Enemies: Public Attitudes in East Asia and Eastern Europe*, (3) *Markets and People: The Czech Reform Experience in a Comparative Perspective*, (4) *Pink Tanks and Velvet Hangovers: An American in Prague*, and also, from above, (5) *Between Utopia and Disillusionment: A Narrative of the Political Transformation in Eastern Europe*, and (6) *Embedded Politics: Industrial Networks and Institutional Change in Postcommunism*.

Ordinary people speak in *Velvet Revolutions*, instead of the insiders, dissidents and other elites that we read about in many other books. Author Miroslav Vaněk pioneered oral history in the Czech Republic and became founding president of the country’s Oral History Association in 2007. *Velvet Revolutions*, published by Oxford University Press in 2016, presents his research in English for the first time. Vaněk interviewed 139 men and women from all kinds of occupations and places in the Czech Republic, although reviewer Mary Heimann faults him for “no explanation as to how interviewees were selected for the study, how statistically representative

they might be or even what specific questions they were asked.” All were born in the 1930s, 1940s or 1950s. The book contains many quotations from what they said, and it reveals anything but the black-and-white judgments that we might expect from people who lived in both times and systems, Communist and post-Communist. These people certainly saw through and resented the many excesses, problems and humiliations that came from the Communists, especially travel restrictions, shortages, corruption and propaganda, and no one wanted the Communists back. But the informants also valued some of what they lost after the old regime fell, such as job security and, as one woman recalled, the “kind of equality [that makes] people miss those days.” Other informants put it this way: “Human rights without social freedoms are worthless,” and “[N]ow we’ve got the same ... consumerism, and I don’t like it.” Mary Heimann points to other haunting testimonies: “Describing the pain and humiliation, at nearly fifty-three, of having to search for work, one man felt it was ‘more than a human being can take,’ ” while another “judged that

little of substance changed from one regime to the next. ‘We have the same freedom as we’ve always had,’ he explained. ‘You can always complain, but it doesn’t do any good if you don’t have enough money or the right connections.’ ”[[12]](#endnote-12)

David Chroust, PhD

d-chroust@tamu.edu

Texas A&M University

1. On the limitations of the academic book review genre as practiced today, and on ideas for making it more useful, see Paul Musgrave, “Against Academic Book Reviews: The capsule format leads to painfully dull work. It’s time to try something new,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 8, 2021, [Against Academic Book Reviews (chronicle.com)](https://www.chronicle.com/article/against-academic-book-reviews?cid=gen_sign_in), accessed on 1/12/2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Quote from Robert Legvold, review of *Out of the Red: Building Capitalism and Democracy in Postcommunist Europe*, by Mitchell A. Orenstein, *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2001), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/capsule-review/2001-11-01/out-red-building-capitalism-and-democracy-postcommunist-europe>, accessed on 10/18/20. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Quote from Seán Hanley, “Spectres of Anti-Capitalism: Three Recent Books Examine Capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe,” review of *Not Only the Market: The Role of the Market, Government, and the Civic Sector in the Development of Postcommunist Societies*, by Martin Potucek, *Central European Review* 2, no. 32 (September 25, 2000), <https://www.pecina.cz/files/www.ce-review.org/00/32/books32_hanley.html>, accessed on 10/19/20. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Robin H.E. Shepherd, *Czechoslovakia:* *The Velvet Revolution and beyond* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Quote from Melissa Feinberg, review of *Revolution with a Human Face*, by James Krapfl, *American Historical Review* 119, no. 4 (October 2014), 1382-1383. This and other reviews below that lack Web links were found in Book Review Digest Plus, an H.W. Wilson database at Texas A&M University Libraries at <https://library.tamu.edu>. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Peter Rutland, review of *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Transformation of Society*, by Ladislav Holy, *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 3 (November 1997), 787-788. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Neil Robinson, “The Political is Personal: Corruption, Clientelism, Patronage, Informal Practices and the Dynamics of Post-Communism,” review of *Runaway State-Building: Patronage Politics and Democratic Development*, by Conor O’Dwyer, and other titles, *Europe-Asia Studies* 59 no. 7 (November 2007), 1217-1224. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Rick Fawn, review of *The Defence of Constitutionalism: The Czech Question in Post-National Europe*, by Jiří Přibáň, *Slavic Review* 77, no. 4 (Winter 2018), 1095-1097, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/slavic-review/article/defence-of-constitutionalism-the-czech-question-in-postnational-europe-by-jiri-priban-trans-stuart-hoskins-vaclav-havel-series-prague-karolinum-press-2017-xvi-312-pp-2000-paper/8E65D3BD123BEE2202CDEFD22D443726/core-reader>, accessed 11/8/20. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Quote from Gerald M. Easter, review of *Divide and Pacify: Strategic Social Policies and Political Protests in Post-Communist Democracies*, by Pieter Vanhuysse, *Political Science Quarterly* 122, no. 4 (Winter 2007/2008), 690-692. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Imre Szeman, review of *Between Utopia and Disillusionment: A Narrative of the Political Transformation in Eastern Europe*, by Henri Vogt, *Utopian Studies* 17, no. 2 (2006), 383-387. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Lawrence King, review of *Embedded Politics: Industrial Networks and Institutional Change in Postcommunism*, by Gerald A. McDermott, *American Journal of Sociology* (January 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. On Miroslav Vaněk, see, for example, <http://www.usd.cas.cz/vyzkumni-pracovnici/vanek-miroslav> and <https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miroslav_Van%C4%9Bk>, accessed 11/15/20. Czech Oral History Association, <http://www.coha.cz/>. Mary Heimann, review of *Velvet Revolutions: An Oral History of Czech Society*, by Miroslav Vaněk and Pavel Mücke, English Historical Review 133, no. 560 (February 2018), 244-246. Miroslav Vaněk and Pavel Mücke, *Velvet Revolutions: An Oral History of Czech Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 41-42 (quotes from Hilkka Lindroos, Jaroslav Sedláček and Victoria Špičková). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)