Semi-Civil Society: A Potential Force for the Democratization of Communist Dictatorships?

By Steven Saxonberg and Jofen Kihlström

## Introduction

It has been much in vogue to discuss the role that civil society can play in bringing about the democratization of societies (Arato 1991, O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986). Some authors gave it credit for bringing down the communist regimes in Eastern Europe (i.e. Tismaneanu1992, Weigle & Butterfield 1992). In fact, the notion of the civil society as something standing separate from and in opposition to the state actually become popularized from the writings of Central European dissidents, such as Kuron and Michnik in Poland, Havel in Czechoslovaki and Konrad in Hungary. To be sure, some scholars working in the Tocquevillian tradition see the state as a sphere that regulates and contributes to the state, but nevertheless, it is still separate from the state (Edwards 2010, Kumar 1993, Waltzer 1998).

This article criticizes the view of civil society as something that is separate from the state. Instead, we argue that such a dichotomy is overly simplistic, as even in well-established Western democracies civil society organizations often engage in corporate arrangements, in which they take over state tasks in return for financial support and thus lose some of their independence from the state (i.e. Offe 1984). In countries with communist-led regimes the division between civil society and the state becomes even more complicated. While it is true that under more hardline, Stalinist regimes, mass organizations tend to act as mere "transmission belts" of Party-state policies (Pravda

and Ruble 1986), once the regimes begin reforming themselves or imploding, then the mass organizations and other official Party-state organizations begin to gain more autonomy and often pressure the regimes for change. In some cases, such as Hungary, one can argue that official organizations actually played a larger role in bringing down the regime than the opposition (Saxonberg 2001). In other cases, such as Czechoslovakia, official organizations, such as the Socialist Youth Organization also played a major role in instigating the "velvet revolution." The degree of autonomy which mass organizations enjoy under communist regimes and the willingness of these organizations to take advantage of their increased autonomy varies from case-to-case, but until the regime actually collapses these organizations are rarely complete autonomous from the state. So rather than speak of civil society, we prefer to use the term "semi-civil" society for these cases. Thus, our view connects to recent theorizing about civil society as a continuum rather than as an absolute sphere that stands completely independent from the state (i.e Uphoff and Krishna 2004).

This article proceeds first by defining "semi-civil" society and discussing the notion of civil society as a continuum. Then it shows how this term can be especially useful for analyzing the former communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Finally, it explains why the semi-civil society has great potential for transforming the reforming Asian communist regimes in Vietnam and China.

**Defining Civil Society and Civil Society as a Continuum**

The modern discourse on civil society emphasizes its alleged separateness from the state. Even those, who do not see the civil society as a mechanism for bringing down a regime, they still often see civil society as a sphere where citizens try to influence the

state without trying to take over or replacing the state. If civil society is understood from such a perspective then it is a space where people can associate freely without state intervention, where people can express their ideas of the good life and try to get others to accept them and cooperate to make them come true (Calhoun 1994, Foley & Edwards 1996, Keane 1998a and 1998b, McIlwaine, 1998, Trädgårdh, 2007).

Civil society, however, has not always been seen as a sphere that is separate from the state. When the term originally emerged in ancient Greece it was used analogously with political society or the state (McIlwaine, 1998, Trädgårdh, 2007, Edwards, 2010, Kumar, 1993). Thus, it had the opposite meaning of today's usage, which shows that one need not necessarily see civil society as something inherently separate from the state. Some scholars today are beginning to question the notion of civil society as being separate from the state and instead see it as part of an integrated system. For example, Landau (2008) relies on Gramsci in arguing that the separation between state, civil society and market is only possible analytically if one sees them as integral parts of a unity. Michael Edwards (2010) views the civil society, state and market as vital parts that are interdependent on each other. He portrays this as an ecosystem, where the interdependency between the parts mean that too much or too little of each part will affect how the other parts work.

This approach has the advantage of not seeing civil society as something distinct from the state, but it is still a bit problematic for studying communist dictatorships, as they often have command economies that live give relatively little space to market forces; yet, as Czechoslovakia and East Germany show, even under such regimes, official organizations can eventually gain some autonomy from the state. We find recent theorizing about civil society as a continuum to be a more fruitful approach. Uphoff and Krishna (2004), for example, see the relationship between civil society

and the state "as a continuum and not as a buffer zone." As Wischermann (2010: 6) notes, "the boundaries between state and civil society are always blurred and are thus a matter of degree rather than a matter of an either/ or view."

If civil society is a space on a continuum, then the need still arises to define just where semi-civil society finds itself on this continuum. Baogang He (1994) was the first to use the term semi-civil society when describing what later on would be known as GONGO's (Government organized NGO's). His attempt to bring in a new typology has not yet gained much support. Apart from some references to his book and articles the concept seems to have weaned away rather quickly (see e.g. McIlwaine, 1998, Howell, 1998, Zhang, 2004). He (1994) claims that the Chinese state was more or less forced to acknowledge NGOs when it started reforming the economy and opening up the economy to market influences. The Chinese regime realized that many NGOs could aid the state in areas like social work and spreading information about HIV; yet, it also understood the political risk of letting them establishing freely. The Communist Party was reluctant to let NGOs work completely autonomously from the state. Consequently, the regime made certain that the state had control over the financial means of the organizations and that directors and members of the board always included Party members. Thus, He concludes that something close to a civil society actually took root in China shortly after the reform, but this civil society is state run and acts on the behalf of the state rather than its members. In successive articles He develops this perspective without using the concept of semi-civil society. In one article, He (2001) concentrates on the dynamics between state and grassroots initiatives, like the first election of a township head in Buyun and in another article, He (2003)classifies five models of grassroots governance. In both articles he argues that the state is so involved in the inner workings of GONGOs that

grassroots movements still are not able to carry out their activities without state approval. Despite He's rather pessimistic view of semi-civil society, more recent studies have had more positive views and see the semi-civil society as becoming more autonomous, although they were initially highly regulated by the Chinese state (Xiaoguang, 2008, Howell, 1998, Painter, 2008, Hsieh Fuh-sheng, 2008, Gu, 1998, Chen, 2005, Morton, 2005).

Our starting point differs from He. Rather than concentrating on GONGOs, we are interested in official Party-state organizations, which tend to become more autonous from that state as soon as openings in the political opportunity structure arise. This includes mass organizations such as unions, youth organizations, women's organizations, etc., as well as other official organizations, such as universities, research centers, newspapers, magazines, journals, etc. Our description of the semi-civil society is similar to Linz's (1973) distinction between the "loyal" and "disloyal" opposition, with the semi-opposition comprising the loyal opposition. Linz (1973: 191) writes that such "semi-opposition" consists of "those groups that are not dominant or represented in the governing group but that are willing to participate in power without fundamentally challenging the regime."

If we perceive civil society as a continuum, then it becomes hard to define exactly where the cut-off points are. We clearly have the extreme cases of hard-core totalitarian states, like North Korea, where basically no amount of independent activity is permitted and thus, civil society cannot exist at all. At the other extreme we have the ideal-type pluralist democracies that theorists such as Dahl have written about, in which a multitude of interest groups compete for influence and most citizens are active in these organizations and creating the kind of social capital that theorists, such as Putnam have written about. Neo-corporatist societies—in which interest

groups become intermeshed with the state, as they take over state responsibilities in turn for economic support—constitute an area somewhat closer to the middle of the continuum. But since the interest organizations engage in these activities freely and are also free to leave these arrangements when they no longer find them beneficial, we still consider them to be belonging to civil society.

Semi-civil society comprises that area in the middle of the continuum, in which the state has penetrated the organizations somewhat, yet these organizations enjoy some amount of autonomy to make their own decisions and pursue their own interests. In some cases, the Party or state creates these organizations, in other cases citizens freely decide to create the organizations, but then need Party or state approval for these organizations to legally exist. Moreover, once they exist, semi-civil society organizations are subject to some amount of control from the Party or state, for example, through demands that Party members get leadership positions, or by the existence of spies and a secret police that can threaten to suppress the organization and its leaders if it goes "too far." The borders of what is "too far," are continuously changing. As a result, the most successful semi-civil society organizations are often those, whose leaders and members are able to correctly gauge the unwritten rules of what the limits are. Thus, semi-civil society organizations face important limits on their capacity to organize themselves as they wish, which theorists such as Calhoun (1994) have pointed out is a key ingredient for civil society.

Since proponents of the idea that civil society can bring down the state often believe that civil society will help bring about mass mobilization (i.e. Weigle & Butterfield 1992), it could be useful to bring in some of the terminology of the social movement literature. In the discourse on the emergence of social movements, one of the most common approaches that has emerged has been the political opportunity

approach (i.e. della Porta & Diani 2006, Kitschelt 1986, and Tarrow 1998). According to this school, uprisings are likely to take place when the political opportunity structure opens up. Tarrow (1991: 14), for example, lists four types of political openings:

- the opening of access to institutional participation,
- disarray among political alignments before the formation of new ones,
- conflicts among political elites which the opposition can take advantage of, and
- offers of help from influential allies from within or without the system.

While we do not necessarily agree that uprisings occur when political opportunity structures open up, we do argue below that as soon as openings in the political opportunity structure arise—either because the regime begins reforming itself or because it begins collapsing—then the official organizations begin to carve out autonomous space for themselves. We argue further that the semi-civil society has in fact played an important role in the collapse of the communist regimes in Europe and is likely to play a prominent role in the eventual downfall of the reforming communist regimes in Asia (i.e. China and Vietnam).

**Semi-Civil Society under the East European Communist Regimes**

To illustrate our argument, we will briefly discuss two East European communist regimes: the reform-oriented Hungarian regime and the more hardline Czechoslovak one. The Hungarian regime initiated negotiations with the opposition, which led to

free elections, while the Czechoslovak regime basically "froze" (Linz & Stepan 1996) when confronted with a mass uprising and handed over power to the opposition.

In Hungary, official intellectuals, working at universities, research centers or in the mass media cooperated with reformists in the regime in pushing for reform. Even though these intellectuals were often aware of the writings of illegal dissidents, the writings of these legal members of the "loyal opposition" most likely had much more influence on the regime than the true dissidents. As Frentzel-Zagórska (1990: 773) remarks,

> Since the mid-1960s Hungarian critical rather than oppositional intellectuals concentrated their endeavours on pressure on the establishment to implement economic reform from above and—in the 1980s—on bringing to power the more radical part of the party's reformist camp.

Critical reports even came from institutions extremely close to the center of power. Tőkes (1996: 169) remarks that the Party's own Institute for Social Sciences as well as universities and research academies wrote radical critiques of the system, which convinced the rulers that they had to change the system and negotiate with the opposition.

Once negotiations began, several of the official researchers eventually met each other as negotiators for both the regime and the opposition at the Round Table negotiations, which negotiated the transition to democracy and the first free elections. One of the participants proclaims that most of the negotiators at the working groups on socio-economic questions fell into one of two groups among reform economists: "those who [had] left the [Party] in time" and "those who had forgotten to leave it in

time" (quoted in Tőkés, 1996: 339). Thus, the Hungarian regime fell in 1989 without any major uprisings induced from civic society organizations. In contrast, semi-civil society actors working at official universities and research centers played a major role in convincing the regime that it could not solve its problems without bringing about systemic change and initiating negotiations with the opposition.

Thus, Hungary presents a clear case of obvious openings in the political opportunity structure, as, for example, institutions opened for political participation during the 1980s as parliamentary elections enabled independent candidates to via for seats in some districts. Possibilities for participation also expanded within the various mass organizations, as members increased their possibilities of influencing the leadership. A split among the leadership between more radical reformers and more conservative reformers made it easier for activists within semi-civil society to gain support from reform communists.

In the more hardline Czechoslovakia, it was more difficult for official organizations to gain some amount of autonomy, but as soon as the political opportunity structures opened up even a little bit, these organizations took advantage of the new opportunities and some went on to play a major role in the "velvet revolution" that eventually brought down the regime. Even though the regime basically maintained its hardline stance against the opposition, it did pay lip-service to *perestroika* and *glasnost* and tried to buy time with symbolic reforms (Saxonberg 2001, Vlačil 1992). This in turn allowed some minimal amount of autonomy to arise for those mass organizations that were skilful in working within the limits of what was allowed. The Socialist Youth Organization presents a good example. Its leader, Vlasil Mohorita, advocated some kind of Czechoslovakian *perestroika* and *glasnost*, which created a political opening, by giving more autonomy to the local Socialist

Youth organizations. At several faculties of the Charles University independent students took advantage of this by publishing newspapers under the auspices of the organization as early as 1987. Since the faculty Socialist Youth Organization agreed to print the newspaper, the authorities did not prevent its distribution. To gain support of the organization, the students allowed SSM to appoint one of the members of the publishing committee and to exercise some influence on the content of the newspaper. Thus, already here we see that the lines between opposition and semi-opposition or civil society and semi-civil society are often blurred.[1]

Independent students are often rightfully given credit for sparking off the velvet revolution, because they organized the mass demonstration with well over 15,000 participants which turned into a nation-wide uprising after rumors spread that the police had killed a participant (i.e. Draper 1993, Wheaton & Kavan 1992). However, many of these independent students were also involved in the independent newspaper that they were able to produce because of their cooperation with the official Socialist Youth Organization. The independent students organized their own organization known as STUHA, but many of them were also members in the official youth organization. For example, Martin Mejstrik, who was the head of the Prague Socialist Youth Organization university council, became one of the most important leaders of the independent students. He used his contacts to get the official organization to cosponsor the demonstration on November 17, thus ensuring that they would get legal permission to hold the demonstration. The official youth organization had little trouble obtaining permission, since it took place on a national holiday commemorating the murder of a Czech student by the Nazis during their occupation.

Once the revolt broke out and the students proclaimed a general strike, students were able to gain access to the communication facilities of the faculty Socialist Youth

Organizations, including their student radio facilities as well as their photocopy and fax machines. At some faculties this was done in cooperation with the official youth organization and at some faculties the independent students simply took control without the youth organization's consent. This helped the students greatly in their efforts to communicate with the population and spread their messages in support of a general strike.

Once the revolt broke out, political parties began acting like political parties. Thus, the Socialist Party and the People's Party, which previously had acted as rubber-stamp parties, which automatically supported the ruling Communist Party, suddenly began acting independently. Thus, on Sunday, November 19, two days after the student demonstration, the Socialist Party Central Committee met and condemned the police intervention and demanded political democracy and guarantees against such further attacks (Fleyberk 1990: 21). The following day, the party newspaper *Svobone slovo* began writing critically of the regime and started printing articles that were supportive of the uprising. On Tuesday, the Socialist Party allowed Havel and other leaders of the revolution to speak from the balcony of its publishing house at the main square, Václavské náměstí in front of hundreds of thousands of people and from then on the fate of the *ancien* regime was basically sealed.

We are by no means claiming here that the semi-civil society organizations, such as the Socialist Youth Organization or the Socialist Party were the most important actors in the revolution, we are merely pointing out that they too played a role in the uprising and cooperated with the official opposition. Our point is that even under the rule of anti-reformist regimes, as in Czechoslovakia, semi-civil society can still play an important role in bringing down the dictatorships once openings emerge which official organizations can use to become more autonomous.

**Semi-Civil Society under Reformist Asian Communist Regimes**

In Vietnam and China, good reason exists to expect semi-civil society to play an even greater role than in Czechoslovakia or Hungary in an eventual transition to democracy. First, the official opposition is much weaker in China than it was in most of the East European countries and in Vietnam it is nearly non-existent. Consequently, semi-civil society is more likely to move in to fill the gap.

Second, market reforms have gone much further than the Hungarian reform communists ever contemplated and therefore, are also obviously much more radical than the conservative, Czechoslovak communist leaders contemplated. This has given many Party-state organizations increased autonomy, as they are now able to engage in entrepreneurial activities and become more economically self-sufficient. For example, according to one study, in China the district headquarters of the Youth League in one province

> ran thirty economic entities in 1993. Among them were a hotel, a kindergarten, a barber shop, a beauty parlor, an applied research institute, two eateries, eleven retail outlets, four trading companies, three repair centers, and five factories. None had anything to do with the political functions of the Youth League (Lin and Zhang 1999: 206).

Third, as a result of this marketization, unions face great pressures to start representing the interests of their members, rather than merely acting as transmission belts of Party-state policies. In contrast to the former reformist East European communist regimes in countries like Hungary, in China and Vietnam most industrial production now takes place in the private sector and much of it in foreign-owned

enterprises. When unions operate in state-run enterprises they face the dilemma that they operating within the domain of enterprises that are supposedly run in the best interests of the workers, as the state is a "workers' state" led by a party that works in the interests of the working class. But if the unions operate within a private enterprise these conditions are no longer valid. This contrast becomes even stronger in the case of foreign-owned enterprises. This is especially the case in China, where many foreign enterprises have Taiwanese owners; yet, capitalist Taiwan is supposedly the country's biggest ideological enemy.

In this section we will focus more on Vietnam than China for two reasons. First, many more studies exist of the Chinese case than the Vietnamese one, which makes it more interesting to study the less-known Vietnamese case. Second, it seems that the Vietnamese unions have gained more autonomy than the Chinese. To be sure, Chinese unions have tried to gain autonomy when the political opportunity structure has opened up. Thus, during the most "liberal" period (1988-1989), the All-China Federation of Trade Unions adopted a document in which nothing was said about unions being under the leadership of the Party (Chan and Norlund 1998:183). Instead, the Federation proclaimed, its main function was the defense "of staff, [and of] workers' and the masses' legal interests and democratic rights." In the conservative aftermath the ensued after the regime violently quenched the Tiananmen Square uprising, the new Party general secretary, Jiang Zemin, delivered a speech demanding that the unions subordinate themselves to the Party. The Federation then "quickly relapsed into its former docility" (ibid. 184).

In Vietnam, by contrast, the unions seem to be enjoying increasing autonomy. The Trade Union Law of 1990 removes nearly all state control over unions. Unions only need to inform the appropriate governmental body or organization that they have

been established, which makes it possible to create more autonomous unions that are not formed from the top-down by Party officials (Clarke, Lee, and Chi 2007: 548). However, the heads of local unions are often managers (ibid.) and even when they are not, their salaries are usually paid by the enterprises (Điều 2011, Nguyên 2011), which prevents the unions from being as tough as they could be in defending workers' interests. As a consequence, wildcat strikes have become quite common. Since 2000, there have been around 100 reported wildcat strikes per year (Clarke, Lee, and Chi 2007: 560). Partially as a result of pressure coming from these wildcat strikes, union leaders are beginning to openly admit that they must do a better job of defending workers' interests (Dương 2012, Tiến, 2010). This indicates that union leaders are well aware of the fact that they need to start acting more like unions in democratic societies. In order to learn how to behave like democratic unions, they have joined international organizations and have begun cooperating with European trade unions. For example, they have sent union leaders to Denmark and Italy for training in union-organizing techniques (Chan and Norlund 1998: 195) and have also taken up contact with American trade unions (Vietnam News Agency 2007).

Unions and other semi-civil society organizations have even begun to lobby and mobilize around certain demands, especially in the instances in which they disagree with certain law proposals. An example is the case when the Vietnamese government proposed radically increasing tuition fees for universities. Representatives of many educational organizations immediately protested against the move. This includes scholars such as Prof. Nguyen Khac Mai of Vietnam Education Promotion Association, Prof. Dao Trong Thi, Former Vice Minister of ET and Chairman of the NA Commission on Culture, Education, Youth and Children, Prof. Pham Phu of HCM City University of Technology, Dr. Tran Xuan Thao, Director of

Vietnam Fulbright Program, Dr. Ho Thieu Tung of Education Research Institute (Tran, 2009, *Nguoilaodong*, 2007a). Many other prominent members of the semi-civil society expressed their worries about limited chances for poor students due to increased tuition. This includes the Chairman of HoChiMinh City Farmers' Union, Vice Chairman, concurrently Secretary General of Vietnam Education Promotion, and the Vice-Chairman of Ho Chi Minh City's Fatherland Front (*Tienphong Online* 2006 and *Vietnamnet Online* 2009).

Another official organization, belonging to semi-civil society that actively campaigned against the tuition increase was the Vietnam Association for Promoting Education (VAPE), which is connected to the Ministry of Education and Training. Together with news coverage via its online newspaper Dantri.com.vn, the Association invited public opinion through their online newspaper (*Dantri Online Newspaper* 2008) and most remarkably, organized a conference on tuition fees policy where presented ideas and papers were recorded and sent to the Prime Minister.

Similarly, the umbrella organization of Vietnamese mass organizations (including the Communist Party), the Fatherland Front, also contested the proposal to increase tuition. Before the 5$^{th}$ session of National Assembly on May 13, 2009, the Vietnam Fatherland Front Central Committee, in collaboration with the National Assembly Standing Committee, collected 2,446 ideas and suggestions from voters and people nationwide concerning such issues as the tuition increase (*Mat Tran Journal*, 2009). These contributions were presented to the National Assembly by the Front Chairman for consideration.

The official mass media also played a major role in mobilizing public opinion against the proposal. A number of popular online newspapers such as *Dantri*, *Vnexpress*, *Vietnamnet*, *Thanhnien online*, and *Nguoilaodong* reported on the proposal,

and opened a "readers' column' that invited ordinary readers to have a say on the issue. All these newspapers reported a large number of entries from readers concerning the Proposal. Particularly, *Nguoilaodong* summarized six groups of proposals from over fifty readers' ideas within a month (*Nguoilaodong*, 2007b).

As a result of this mobilization against the fee increases, the National Assembly eventually passed a much more watered down version of the fee increase, which allowed universities to raise tuition fees by up to 50% compared to the original proposal that would have allowed increases of up to 500% (NA Resolution No. 35/2009/QH12, PM signed Decision No. 1310 QD-TTg).

This example shows that semi-civil society organizations, such as the Fatherland Front, newspapers, as well as leaders of unions and educational organizations played an active role in contesting governmental policies. This does not necessarily mean that they are actively fighting for democracy or that they promote regime change. Thus, Thayer (2009) claims:

> Vietnamese NGOs view their role quite differently from their foreign counterparts. First, they see themselves as partners working on development projects in support of state policy. Second, they view themselves as advocates for improved state services. And finally, they view themselves as representative of marginalized groups and lobby the state for changes in policy. In this role Vietnamese NGOs attempt to negotiate and educate state officials rather than confront them as a tactic to bring about change.

Although Thayer refers to NGOs rather than official mass organizations, this observation basically holds true for them as well. Nevertheless, by starting to contest governmental policies, by starting to more openly promote the interests of their members, the Vietnamese semi-civil society is laying the ground for a more pluralist society that could evolve into a democratic one.

## Conclusion

Scholars writing about communist regimes have tended to underplay or even ignore the importance of semi-civil society. Yet, semi-civil society organizations can help bring about the democratization of communist dictatorships in several ways. Under reforming regimes as in Hungary and now in Vietnam, they can help bring about a pluralization of society as they begin to defend the interests of their members visa-vis the Party and state and also visa-vis private enterprises. The more pluralized the society becomes, the more difficult it becomes for the Communist Party to legitimize its monopoly of power. To the extent that semi-civil society organizations challenge policies or they write reports that are critical of societal developments, they can also potentially convince the Party-state leadership that systemic change is necessary. The Hungarian case shows it is possible for semi-civil society organizations to convince the regime that systemic change is necessary without openly advocating such radical change. It was enough to write reports that highlighted the mounting social problems that they regime had not been able to solve. A similar process could emerge in Vietnam as well.

The Czechoslovak case shows that even when a hardline regime is in power, which does not provide many openings in the political opportunity structure, semi-civil society organizations are still able to often rapidly transform themselves the minute the regime begins cracking and even small openings arise. The Socialist Youth Organization greatly helped the uprising by co-sponsoring the student demonstration that sparked off the uprising. It was able to co-sponsor the demonstration with independent students partially because the regime felt itself forced to pay lip-service to Gorbachev's ideas about *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which made it possible for the

Socialist Youth Organization to take small steps in a reformist direction. Reformists within the organization took advantage of this opening to cooperate with independent students.

Once the uprising began, independent student leaders (who often were also leaders in the official youth organization) were able to use the facilities of the Socialist Youth Organization (such as phones, faxes, photocopying machines, student radio stations) to communicate with the rest of the population. Two days later, when Havel and other dissidents founded Civic Forum as the main opposition group, the Social Party lent its support. Its newspaper began writing articles in support of the uprising and the Social Party allowed Civic Forum leaders, such as Havel, address the crowds from its balcony.

In arguing that semi-civil society has played an important role in bringing down communist-led regimes and in arguing that the semi-civil society could also play a major role in bringing down the reforming communist regimes in countries, such as China and Vietnam, we are by no means claiming that semi-civil society is the only or even the main factor in bringing about such change. Clearly others factors, such as the loss of ideological legitimacy (Saxonberg 2001) or "legitimacy from the top" (Di Palma 1991), the persistence of economic stagnation (Bates 1991, Szelenyi and Szelenyi, 1994), etc., also matter. Nor do we want to downplay the important and even heroic role that dissidents and openly opposition groups play in bringing down communist regimes in those cases in which mass uprisings emerge (as in Czechoslovakia and East Germany and to some extent in Romania). We are merely arguing that semi-civil society plays an important role and scholars have tended to ignore its role. When actual revolutions take place then the disloyal opposition is likely to play an important role in supporting the official opposition and it helps tip

the scale in favor of the opposition. When negotiated change takes place, semi-civil society organizations are likely to play an important role in convincing the regime to initiate such negotiations, as its activities can help convince the regime that more radical-systemic change is necessary.

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[1] Most of the information on Czechoslovakia comes from Saxonberg (2001).