dition, and an Eastern European type characterized by the experience of illegality. So far so good, but Eley repeatedly emphasizes the exceptionalism of the British labor movement, and on this I beg to differ. As I have argued at length elsewhere, British social democracy belongs to the core of social democratic traditions, on a par with Scandinavian and central European social democracy.

Finally, is Eley not writing off too early the social democracies of contemporary Europe as agents for democratization? In the final part of the book Eley identifies with new social movements but cannot see the social democratic parties as agents of democratic change. Today’s social democratic parties and their politics are surely not, as Eley alleges, mere media events. The ideas of the intellectuals who continue to shape those parties’ politics, such as Anthony Giddens in Britain or Jürgen Habermas or Oskar Negt in Germany, are not discussed by Eley, and it is too easy to dismiss their orientation toward elections as populism. In the past, socialist parties too often have ignored the wishes of voters and suffered the consequences of a left-wing avant-gardism, which supposes that the left has a mission to lead the public rather than listen to the public.

Other readers may well wish to debate other points in the book, but I cannot imagine anyone who will not be moved by the passion with which Eley puts forward his arguments, who will not be intrigued by the intellectual brilliance with which he makes his case, and who will not be hugely impressed by the wonderful mastery of a vast range of narratives assembled here. This book is a tremendous achievement, but few would have expected anything less from its author.


Reviewed by Federigo Argentieri, John Cabot University (Rome)

Academia certainly was one of the fields of human activity most affected by the bitter political and ideological confrontation of the Cold War. In the years immediately after 1945, many scientists and researchers from all over Europe briefly nourished hopes that, after having fallen into the abyss of such a murderous conflict as World War II, the Old Continent would finally see the triumph of humanist principles. Their dream was that scientific and scholarly research would benefit from unlimited international cooperation, generously supported and promoted by every government for the cause of peace and human progress.

Although this vision was indeed realized, at least in part, in the restricted core of what became Western Europe—with its U.S.-sponsored “Euro Atlantic” institutions (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Council of Europe, the Common Market/European Union, and the like)—the most ardent proponents of the vision were
probably living on what was quickly becoming the “wrong” side of the Iron Curtain. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe had not yet switched from the Scylla of Hitlerism to the Charybdis of Stalinism, and some of the leading democratic intellectuals in those countries were hoping against all odds that the moment had finally come, after hundreds of years of forcible division, for them to attain equal status with the advanced countries of the West.

People like Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš, Hungary’s political thinker István Bibó, and many others dreamed of a special role to be played by their countries, that of a political and cultural “bridge” between the capitalist West and the Soviet East. Such a role also entailed a domestic experiment: an attempt at blending the advantages of both systems in a “third way” that, if successful, could overcome the constant tension between freedom and social justice and might even provide an example and a path to follow for both the Eastern and the Western prevailing models.

Alas, the year 1948 put an end to all remaining hopes in both Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The time was up for the “third-wayists,” who could now choose between being silenced or going into exile. Among the latter, one finds the distinguished Hungarian biochemist Albert Szent-Györgyi, discoverer of vitamin C in 1931 and winner of the Nobel prize in chemistry in 1937. The first part of Györgyi Péteri’s book, which consists of a collection of essays related to the role of science and scholarship in Hungary under Communism, is basically devoted to the substantial contribution that Szent-Györgyi provided to the “third way” utopian dream.

Szent-Györgyi, born in 1893 to a family of the upper-middle nobility, had maintained strong links to Anglo-American academic institutions since the mid-1920s and had spent four years in Great Britain at Cambridge University working with people like Joseph Needham, who held rather radical views. Also, Szent-Györgyi’s research at home was generously supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. Aware of the great damage that World War II was causing to Hungary’s connections to the West, he took the initiative in February 1943 of traveling to Istanbul to meet the British and make himself available to lead a new Hungarian government that would take the side of the Allies. Information on the meeting was also sent to Moscow, where Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov took careful note of Szent-Györgyi’s political ambitions.

When the Soviet army occupied Budapest two years later, the scientist and his family were offered protection by an English-speaking officer and were kept in hiding until the late spring of 1945, long after the new political authorities were installed in office. In the summer, Szent-Györgyi endeavored to pay a two-month visit to the Soviet Union, where he was, so to say, solemnly “christened” a fellow-traveler of the Communists. Aware of the dangers, he arranged a meeting with the Australian minister in Moscow and expressed his fears of losing contact with Anglo-American science, particularly with the Rockefeller Foundation. But the dice had already been cast, and Hungary’s Communist Party leader Mátyás Rákosi carefully withheld the visas that could have eased Szent-Györgyi’s fears.

Upon returning to Budapest after what was called his “Faustian deal” with the Soviet Union, Szent-Györgyi set up a Hungarian Academy of Natural Sciences that
was separate from and opposed to the humanities-oriented and rigidly conservative Academy of Sciences that had been founded in 1825. This initiative served various purposes: Szent-Györgyi was the standardbearer of a philosophy and policy of science whereby natural sciences were by definition superior to and more useful than the so-called human sciences. This was not entirely untrue, especially in a context such as the Hungarian academic community, which was thickly covered by the dust of obsolescence. One of Szent-Györgyi’s mistakes, however, was his failure to realize that several members of the old Academy, the so-called “conservative reformers,” were favorable to the idea of a profound renewal. Thanks to the efforts of the minister of education, Dezső Keresztes, the two academies merged a year after the rift, and Szent-Györgyi, contrary to his hopes, became the vice president. He had contributed to the Communist policy of weakening the old Academy without even being rewarded with the presidency. Increasingly aware of his political failure, he defected to the United States in the summer of 1947 before it was too late, and started a new life carefully confined within the limits of natural sciences.

In the second part of the book, Péteri’s essays focus mainly on the field of economic science, in particular on how it literally died and was then resurrected following the ups and downs of Hungarian Stalinism in 1949–1955. Despite the brutal suppression of the 1956 Revolution, the pragmatic approach to economics that had prevailed was maintained, enabling the country to limit the misdeeds of central planning throughout the Communist period. Despite some redundancies, Péteri’s collected essays are coherent and solidly grounded in an excellent use of both Hungarian and Western sources, and they offer original and useful insights into a little-explored aspect of contemporary European history.


Reviewed by Steven I. Levine, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This book is of fundamental importance to understanding twentieth-century Chinese history, comparative revolution, and early Cold War history. Weaving together strands of military, social, political, and international history, Westad provides by far the best empirically grounded, multi-archival, and comprehensive nationwide analysis of how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) achieved victory in the Chinese civil war of 1946–1950. Most earlier scholars, both outside and inside China, have slighted the significance of the civil war years, tending to view the Chinese Communist victory and the Chinese Nationalist defeat as the almost inevitable outcome of major historical, socioeconomic, and political trends in modern Chinese history. Westad’s most significant contribution is to emphasize the contingent nature of the CCP’s victory in the civil war. It is not far-fetched to suppose that quite plausible alterations in Nation-