

THE OTHER EUROPE

This is the first documentary series to deal with the identity of the lost or forgotten Europe: those countries which were occupied by the Soviet Union in 1945, and are separated from the West by the Iron Curtain.

1. The Other Europe. Totalitarian systems and the peoples of Central Europe.
2. The Ice Age. The experience of Stalinism, 1945-53.
3. Them. The Party in Stalinist and contemporary times.
4. What is to be Done? The failed utopia of socialist planning and the economic crisis of the present.
5. Power of the Powerless. Film-making, writing, theatre, painting, jazz and punk: the counter-cultures of the Other Europe.
6. The Last Empire. 1956, 1968, 1980: the great dates of popular uprisings against the Soviet system. Gorbachev and the future of the Other Europe.

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PRESS RELEASE

"These countries between Germany and Soviet Russia are known as the Eastern bloc. But historically, culturally, they are the heart of Europe. They are part of our Western culture. They are us."

Jacques Rupnik

The most heavily fortified frontier in the world runs today, as it has done for over 40 years, through the heartland of European civilisation. The countries of Central Europe, which disappeared from view when the Iron Curtain first came down, remain largely unknown and misunderstood in the West.

This series has two fundamental aims: to restore the countries of Central Europe to the consciousness of the West; and to show "how it really is" under a system that still has the ambition to exercise "total control".

This is the first major documentary series to examine the impact of 40 years of Communist rule on the nations of the "Other Europe" from the perspective of the Other Europeans themselves. Our presenter, Jacques Rupnik, was born in Prague. He has direct experience of the Stalinist era in Czechoslovakia, and has published a definitive history of the Czech Communist Party. He is ideally placed to present the views of the Other Europeans to a Western audience.

This series is especially relevant in the era of "glasnost" and "perestroika", since a number of the nations in Central Europe have been for many years attempting reforms that go beyond even Mikhail Gorbachev's proposed changes in the Soviet Union. But how relevant are Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms for the future of Communism? The record of Hungarian and Polish reforms is, as we show, not encouraging.

Two years' continuous working and filming in Central Europe has resulted in an unprecedented amassing of contemporary and archive film. "The Other Europe" contains many originally shot sequences, offering rare glimpses of official and unofficial reality in Socialist Europe. These include a meeting of disillusioned party members inside the shipyards of Gdansk; a Polish censor vetting a cinema newsreel; film of a labour camp in Romania; the first-ever filming of an arsenal of weapons for the Workers' Militia hidden inside a regional Communist Party headquarters in Hungary; and an arrest and interrogation by

Hungary's new economic police; the East German "Jugendweihe" ceremony (the equivalent of a Communist "christening"); meetings of a newly formed unofficial youth group FIDESZ in Budapest; a rhetoric class for Party activities in the Party's Academy in Warsaw; Solidarity radio broadcasting in Nowa Huta. Underground filming specially shot for the series includes a Solidarity television service in operation; film showing the destruction of central Bucharest by President Ceausescu; a young Czech psychologist reduced to a sweeping job by the authorities.

"The Other Europe" also features archive material some of which has never been seen in the West before - including, for example, the director Miklos Jansco's flamboyantly epic Stalinist film of May Day in Hungary in 1952; a concert given by the Hungarian Secret Police praising Stalin; a Soviet black propaganda film about the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia; a Polish official documentary attacking Western decadent art; and the enrolment of political commissars in the Hungarian army. There is footage of the famous show trials of the 1950s in Central Europe and of the elaborate Imperial mourning that surrounded the death of Stalin in 1953.

There are interviews in the series with top Party leaders like Janos Berecz, the Hungarian Party's top ideologist and Politburo member, and Mieczyslaw Rakowski, now Prime Minister of Poland, as well as with major opposition figures and critics such as Lech Walesa, Solidarity advisors Jacek Kuron and Boleslaw Geremek; and with young leaders of Hungary's recently created democratic students' movement.

There are also rare interviews with former high-ranking security police officers - including Romania's former head of military counter intelligence Ion Pacepa (sentenced to death in absentia) - and with former Stalinist show trial victims. Other interviewees include the self-styled "Leninist Banker", Sandor Demian in Budapest; the Polish film director Andrzej Wajda; unemployed workers in Hungary; miners who witnessed the murder of their colleagues by the militia in Poland in 1981; the banned writers Vaclav Havel, Milan Simecka, Jurgen Fuchs, Stefan Heym, Monika Maron, George Konrad and Josef Skvorecky.

Power, ideology, resistance, art, the traumas of the totalitarian experiment; all combine to make "The Other Europe" a unique portrait of European cultures trapped and surviving in extremis, though at a high physical and spiritual loss.

The series took over four years to make from its initial conception and cost over a million pounds. It was fully funded by Channel 4 and made by PANOPTIC PRODUCTIONS. The Executive Producer is Nicholas Fraser, the Series Editor, Michael Jones, and the series was produced and directed by Tom Roberts.

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PROGRAMME ONE: "THE OTHER EUROPE"

"A pure totalitarian system has never existed and can never exist because it is an attempt to control centrally every aspect of life - which is impossible. But still the attempt is made and it will always be met with resistance - defying it-for life must defy it."

Jacek Kuron

This programme introduces the experience of Communism in the Other Europe from 1945 to the present day. In contemporary Prague our Czech-born presenter, Jacques Rupnik, establishes the survival of a distinctive Central European culture and shows how that culture has kept alive values that challenge directly the Communist Party-State political system. Leading thinkers from the region such as Vaclav Havel, Milan Simecka and Jacek Kuron, explore the meaning and nature of "tired totalitarianism" as it exists today in Central Europe.

In Poland the programme looks at Nowa Huta, the New City that was to be a model of the radiant future of Soviet-style socialism. We chart the growth of disillusionment among the workers of Nowa Huta with the Party-State that created it, leading to a resurgence of Polish Nationalism and Catholicism and the emergence of Nowa Huta as a bastion of the Solidarity movement.

Romania, the last stronghold of neo-Stalinism in Europe, has degenerated under the rule of Nicolae Ceausescu and his family into a highly personalised dictatorship maintained by an omnipresent security police - "socialism in one family". An interview with the former head of Romania's counter-intelligence, Ion Pacepa, tells how Ceausescu's security police planned to convert all the telephones in the country into bugging devices.

The crude dictatorship of the Ceausescu family stands in marked contrast to the much more effective and efficient version of the "routine totalitarianism" practised in the German Democratic Republic. Unlike some of the other nations in the socialist bloc, the East German state still tries to control what people think. We examine how the GDR is creating a new ideology for its state, combining the authoritarianism of Leninist political culture with a revival of nationalism and Prussian militarism-satirised even in East Berlin in a popular stage play. None of these "totalitarianisms", Jacques Rupnik concludes, offer the people of the Other Europe what they most desire - democratic freedoms.

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PROGRAMME TWO: "THE ICE AGE"

"In 1948 you really had only three choices. One, join them. Two, go to the West if you could; that wasn't easy. Or three, go to jail."

Zoltan Nyeste

This programme concentrates on the crucial historical period from the end of the Second World War to the death of Joseph Stalin. The devastation of the nations of the Other Europe in the War, including the deliberate destruction of many of their national elites and ethnic minorities by the Nazis, prepared the way for the Soviet-engineered seizure of power by the Communist Parties.

Hungary and Czechoslovakia provide two very different nations, each of which succumbed to the Soviet Communist technology of power and, like most of the new Communist states, suffered the rapid elimination of all the political forces and classes that might oppose the Communist ambition of exercising a monopoly of power.

Although at first the new Communist systems were able to incorporate their distinctive national needs and aspirations, such individuality was soon crushed by Stalin everywhere but in Yugoslavia. Under his direct orders, representatives of less repressive variants of Communism were removed from power in Soviet-style purges of the Communist parties of Central Europe, bringing about the bizarre spectacle of Party leaders confessing to being American spies and all manner of other crimes against the Party.

These purges show European nations in the grip of the Stalinist mechanisms of fear, ideology and the personality cult. The population was constantly mobilised to take part in political meetings and mass demonstrations in streets and factories, in endless campaigns against enemies of the people. Labour camps were set up and there was a sustained attempt to seal the nations of the Other Europe off from the outside world. Only with Stalin's death in 1953 did this frenzy recede.

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PROGRAMME THREE: "THEM"

"The expression 'democratic communism' makes as much sense as dry water. Democratic communism would simply be no communism at all. It's as simple as that."

Leszek Kolakowski

This programme looks at the most important and powerful force in the Other Europe: the Communist Party.

Our presenter, Jacques Rupnik, examines the nature of the Leninist Party and what separates it from both Western-style political parties and dictatorships which do not have totalitarian ambitions. The programme looks at the Hungarian Party as a possible model for a more reformist and liberal style of Communist rule in Central Europe. We look at one of the Party's most basic units - a cell in a Salami factory in Szeged, following the recruitment of new members and the activities of the Workers' Militia. We film, for the first time ever, one of the secret military arsenals held inside Communist Party buildings in Hungary. At the Party newspaper Nepszabadsag, we also consider the current role and purpose of Party ideology.

The biggest internal crisis a Communist Party has faced this decade was the imposition of martial law in Poland in December 1981. We look at how the Polish Party has since tried to re-establish itself. The current decline and democratisation of the party is appraised in a sequence at the Gdansk shipyards, the birthplace of Solidarity.

This analysis of the Hungarian and Polish Parties raises the most fundamental political issue facing Communist Europe: can a Communist Party democratise itself and surrender its political monopoly of power yet still remain in power?

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PROGRAMME FOUR: "WHAT IS TO BE DONE?"

"One of the headlines in our Central plan was 'The Number of Reindeer Herdsmen'. But there are no reindeer herds in Czechoslovakia."

Jiri Slama

This programme concentrates on the history of economic failure of the Other Europe.

The main features of the economies of the Other Europe were imported from the Soviet Union: nationalisation; the creation of a monolithic, centralised Super-Plan; the dominance of heavy industry; the emergence of an elite of "managers of socialism"; the suppression of independent trade unions and, above all, the subjugation of the economic system to the political needs of absolute control of the Leninist Party state. Rare archive footage reveals some of the excesses of the heroic era of Communist economics - including a song to a new locomotive sung by enthusiastic workers. The great promises of the post-war years are contrasted to the ersatz consumerism and corruption today.

In Poland we show how the system in decay crushingly affects the lives of Polish citizens and look at the political and economic obstacles in the way of any attempts to reform the economy. Underground film also shows the virtual collapse of Poland's health service.

Hungary has had the most consistent and radical economic reforms in Communist Europe. The programme looks at the revival of market mechanisms, at the new self-styled "Leninist" bankers and at the work of individual entrepreneurs, often harassed by the State bureaucracy. We consider the impact of the new market disciplines on the old, centrally-planned economic and welfare system. The programme features the first factory in a Communist state to be declared officially bankrupt and closed down, and an arrest by Hungary's new economic police of a black marketeer.

The drive to reform the economy is the power behind "perestroika", but in the Other Europe reform so far has been limited by the need for the Party to retain political control.

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PROGRAMME FIVE: "THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS"

"What was socialist realism for? The reason for it was that the arts were part of a larger whole, the aim of which was to create the Socialist Man, a New Man who was supposed to differ totally from the type of man preceding him."

Andrzej Wajda

This programme looks at the counter-cultures of the Other Europe which express values and beliefs opposed to the prevailing ideology of the ruling Communist Parties.

In the Stalinist era, the new Communist regimes established absolute control over all aspects of society, setting up new orthodoxies in artistic and intellectual life. We show for the first time extracts from some of the "classic" Stalinist artworks - including a film attacking decadent Western art.

The story of Czech cinema from the late 1950s shows how film-makers and writers gradually escaped from the Stalinist orthodoxies and re-created a film culture that directly criticised the political oppression of the Communist system. Many of the extracts shown in this programme are from films that the Czech government has declared "banned forever", including Vojtech Jasný's masterpiece about the forced collectivisation of peasants: "All My Good Countrymen".

Even in the most ideologically policed and rigorously conformist Communist state in Central Europe, the German Democratic Republic, we see writers struggling against the system of censorship. We also look at the special case of Poland, where the powerful Catholic Church has provided an umbrella under which a vast range of counter-cultures flourish, from large-scale independent publishing houses to satirical cabarets.

Leading oppositionists describe how they see these counter-cultures, and the persistent efforts of individuals and nations to preserve their own identity, preparing the way for the liberation of the Other Europe.

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PROGRAMME SIX: "THE LAST EMPIRE"

"Gorbachev has put in motion social forces which are simply pushing the system towards total disintegration. Whether he likes it or not, we are going with him all the way towards democracy."

Jacek Kuron
(Solidarity Advisor)

This programme examines the many attempts to change the basic political system of Communist Party rule in the Other Europe.

It looks at the open revolts in the GDR in 1953, and in Hungary in 1956, and their suppression by the Red Army. During the Prague Spring of 1968, a ruling Party tried to reform itself from within and build "socialism with a human face". We examine how, after the Soviet invasion, both the Party and the people were systematically purged and punished in the long period known as "normalisation" which continues today.

The last major political crisis in the Communist system was the rise and suppression of Solidarity in Poland in 1980-81. There, the most efficient coup against the workers ever staged by a Communist regime has been followed by the least effective "normalisation" of the Party and society. Our footage includes for the first time eye-witness accounts of the shooting of workers at the Wujek mine and the admission by a senior party official that martial law was planned from the moment Solidarity was founded.

Behind all these failed attempts lies the Soviet Union and the veto of the Red Army. Real change has always been considered impossible as long as the nations of the Other Europe remain colonies in the Soviet Empire.

From the vantage point of Moscow we consider whether Mikhail Gorbachev's rule creates new political possibilities for the Parties and the peoples of Communist Europe. Leading figures young and old from the Other Europe offer their view of Gorbachev and the fate of the empire which they are reluctantly a part of.