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## INTRODUCTION

### THE LESSONS OF 1989 FOR SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

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The study of social change has recently become one of the central concerns of sociology (Sztompka 1993). This is the natural response to the dramatic experience of the "century of change", as the twentieth century might perhaps be called. Among profound and rapid transformations that we have witnessed in the twentieth century, the collapse of communism will most likely prove to be of truly world-historical significance. In this article I will suggest some implications of that event for sociological thinking about change.

#### The Lessons of 1989

Like every major revolution in history, the anti-communist revolution in East-Central Europe must be considered as a long process rather than a singular event. In this sense, in spite of eight years that have passed since that glorious "Autumn of Nations 1989", the revolution is still unfinished. Looking back one can distinguish three phases in the ongoing revolutionary process.

The first, historically located in the seventies and the eighties may be called the *heroic and romantic phase*. This is the period of growing contestation, emerging democratic opposition, new forms of social self-organization and slow decay of economic and political foundations of 'real socialism'. Several theories have proven their explanatory power with respect to these phenomena. Sociological accounts of the period have successfully invoked theories of collective behavior and social movements (Sztompka 1982, Sztompka 1988), of legitimization and deligitimization of power (Rychard and Sulek 1988), of system equilibrium and disequilibrium (Staniszki 1989), re-emerging civil society (Nowak 1980, Koralewicz and Ziolkowski 1990) etc.

The second phase, dated around 1989-1990 may be called *euphoric, revolutionary period*. The striking fact is that the actual break, the collapse of communism was not predicted by any sociological theory. Of course, most scholars were aware that eventually the system has to falter and disintegrate. But the moment and the speed with which it occurred came by surprise to everybody concerned. It is easier to interpret it *ex post*, trying to understand how it did occur. Here the theories of relative deprivation, social frustration and anomie, dual sovereignty, charismatic leadership etc., prove quite helpful.