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New Global Studies

Volume 6, Issue 3

2012

Article 5

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Recommended Citation:

Grodsky, Brian Keith (2012) "Counter-Elites Swimming Up-Stream: The Challenge of Pursuing a Political Rights Agenda where Economic Rights Trump," *New Global Studies*: Vol. 6: Iss. 3, Article 5.

DOI: 10.1515/1940-0004.1175

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Counter-Elites Swimming Up-Stream: The Challenge of Pursuing a Political Rights Agenda where Economic Rights Trump

Brian Keith Grodsky

Abstract

The most recent spate of ‘democratic revolutions’, ushering in the fourth wave of democratization, seems to lend support to those advocating for the primacy of political and civil rights, over economic, cultural and social ones, in the human rights framework. In this article, I challenge that idea, arguing instead that the most recent regime changes, like so many that have preceded them, were, if anything, more about economic rights than political ones. I reassess not only the most recent ‘revolutions’, but also those that took place over the course of the 20th century, showing commonalities among the human rights goals of communists, anti-communists and contemporary pro-democracy leaders. By framing these various revolutionaries as human rights agents, and mass publics as their allies, this article is designed to engage readers in a debate about what, if any, sorts of rights truly hold primacy. The difference between today’s pro-democracy leaders and yesterday’s communist ones rests on the perceived international legitimacy of the democratic template. Yet all of these leaders, I argue, have essentially struggled for political change not as an end, but as a means to improved economic rights.

KEYWORDS: human rights, revolution

Author Notes: I would like to thank for their valuable comments the participants of the Conference on Law and Human Rights in Global History, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, March 2012.

INTRODUCTION

The most recent democratic revolutions around the world have seemed to accentuate the primacy of political and civil rights. From Europe to the Middle East, citizens have come together in large numbers to demand the dismantling of various non-democratic regimes and the erection of more legitimate, democratic ones. In this article, I argue that the most recent regime changes (many of which have ultimately proven so disappointing to so many) are fundamentally similar to regime changes going back at least a century. And that they actually demonstrate the dominant place of economic, rather than political, rights in the minds of the citizens.

Communist revolutionaries of yesterday obviously differ enormously from the pro-democracy leaders of today, but they are similar along two important dimensions. First, both sets of actors view the pre-revolutionary state as anathema to the accord of human rights; and, second, both have relied on notions of (il)legitimacy to attain power. In the former cases, which preceded any international norm that might relate regime type and legitimacy, revolutionaries sought to delegitimize the status quo by demonstrating that it failed to provide for the prosperity of their populations. In the latter cases, occurring in an international context where democracy is a source of legitimacy, those leading the struggle have sought to delegitimize the incumbents by pointing to their failure to respect this democratic norm.

All of this seems to suggest the primacy of political rights in the current period. Yet if we scratch the surface, and dig beyond the loud calls for political change, including greater opportunities for representation and basic freedoms such as speech and assembly, it becomes evident that the most recent revolutions were about far more than civil liberties. They were, like those of revolutionaries a century earlier, about human rights – but especially economic ones.

A glance at the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) – one of three human rights texts that together make up an international ‘bill of rights’ – reads like a laundry list of subthemes that emerged in not only the most recent pro-democracy movements, but also other regime changes going back decades. Right to a decent living? Article 7(a)(ii). Right to equal employment opportunities? Article 7(c). Right to organize for greater pay and/or benefits? Article 8. Medical safeguards and educational opportunities for all? Articles 12 and 13. The only common demand not listed explicitly in the ICESCR seems to be an end to corruption. But this, as has been noted in official documents released by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, is a subtext to Article 2, in which signing states oblige themselves

to “achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the current convention.”¹

To those human rights scholars and advocates who have long sought to delete the artificial borders created between political and civil rights, on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights, on the other, this point is nothing new. But because of the potentially dramatic policy ramifications this has, I believe it needs, at the very least, new life in the current period. Reinterpreting the most recent revolutions as primarily struggles for economic rights, with political rights believed to be a necessary catalyst, helps to explain the miserable outcomes of the various ‘democratic revolutions’ of late. The revolutionary elites, who were human rights agents, and most of their constituents, who so quickly became allies, were less interested in the flowery talk of democracy than they were in the mechanisms that promised more robust delivery of economic rights. From this perspective, it is not a surprise that empowered elites have also been less devoted to democratic principles than was at first believed.

I begin this article by looking at revolutionaries as human rights advocates, beginning with three communists, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro, and ending with an avowed anti-communist, Lech Walesa. Next, confining my study to Eurasia’s (post)communist experience, I explore possible explanations for the dominance of economic rights values and, at the same time, explore how agents of one set of rights can turn out to be adversaries of another. I then analyze the cases of recent democratic revolutions from a human rights standpoint.

POLITICAL REVOLUTIONARIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS: FROM LENIN TO THE LENIN SHIPYARD

Although it seems unlikely at first glance, a closer look suggests that today’s champions of democracy in Egypt and Tunisia have fought for many of the same things as those demanding communism in Europe a hundred years before them. Just as the former group is frequently associated with the human rights movement, communists from the early and middle 20th century might be seen as human rights advocates before their time. Their appeals were at the time broad – with no international law to reference – but also quite clear: they were focused primarily, but not exclusively, on a list of economic rights that were radical for their time, but could be subsequently linked closely to those espoused by the 1976 (effective date) ICESCR.

¹Maina Kiai, "How Human Rights Principles & Approaches Can Help in Fighting Corruption," in *HR/POL/GG/SEM/2006/BP.2*, ed. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Warsaw: 2006).

Calling Lenin and Mao human rights activists seems almost heretical, given the enormous human toll they and their revolutions took. Yet they were, as I show briefly below, leading revolutions that they promised would ensure greater human rights. The very act of defining human rights activism can be challenging, even contentious, leading some scholars to adopt a categorization based on “self-definition.”² Within this broad grouping are those organizations that advocate for everything from a halt to state torture and extrajudicial murder to equality for specific, disadvantaged sectors of the population (e.g., women, the young or old, particular ethnic groups). But also included are those demanding a broad structural remedy to rights abuses, in the form of regime change (and, more specifically, democratization). Human rights activists are those individuals who stand up for the downtrodden.

Reference to any sorts of historic human rights activists based on self-definition is somewhat problematic since international human rights took on a more complete legal character only in the mid- to late 20th century. Yet there were certainly individuals who claimed to speak on behalf of those suffering from abuses well before then. The 19th century movement against slavery, for instance, was among the first cases of transnational advocacy in the human rights sphere, predating today’s broad international human rights framework by a century and a half.³ And if we accept that human rights agents can come in a range of shapes and sizes, we open up space for a gamut of revolutionaries to play their part.

Revolutions, defined by Skocpol as “rapid, basic transformations of socio-economic and political institutions,” are frequently organized around themes central to human rights.⁴ State leaders tasked with ensuring the security and prosperity of their subjects can do this by merely abstaining from hurting (negative rights, such as freedom from government harassment), or, in a more pro-active way, by providing (conditions conducive to) a long list of positive rights, including the provision of certain goods and services. Not coincidentally, much of the good government literature is oriented toward the provision of core political goods and services, which are essential to ruling elites’ political viability.⁵ Numerous revolutions in the name of political rights were rooted in

² Christine Bell and Johanna Keenan, “Human Rights Nongovernmental Organizations and the Problems of Transition,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 26 (2004): 336.

³ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁴ Theda Skocpol, *States and Revolutions in the Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁵ Stephen B. Cornell and Joseph B. Kalt, “Successful Economic Development and Heterogeneity of Governmental Form on American Indian Reservations,” in *Getting Good Government: Capacity-Building in the Public Sectors of Developing Countries*, ed. Merilee Grindle (Cambridge: HIID/Harvard University Press, 1997), Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, “Political Structure and Economic Policy: The Institutional Determinants of Policy Outcomes,” in

economic deficiencies, including those in America (reflecting anger at taxation without representation) and France (where revolutionaries felt the status quo rulers inadequately took into account the economic pain experienced by the masses).

Twentieth century revolutionaries fighting in the name of ideologies quite distinct from democracy did so with an even greater focus on economic rights. Lenin's obtuse demand for communism and "all power to the soviets" (workers' councils) was less catchy than his infamous call for "peace, land, and bread," which was, at least with respect to the latter two, a call to provide economic rights where there were none. Lenin was not alone among communist revolutionaries demanding human rights for their people: Mao demanded that peasants and workers, in first order, be guaranteed critical social and economic rights, especially food, housing, health care and education.⁶⁷ And Castro, quoting Locke and Rousseau in his famous 1953 speech, "History Will Absolve Me," warned of his pending revolution: "no violence can vanquish the people once they are determined to win back their rights."⁶⁸ It is easy to forget, given the systematic abuses that took place in each of the communist regimes, that the communist revolutions were actually about human rights, as most revolutions tend to be.

A more explicit study of these revolutionary movements drives this point home. In the first case, Russia, Lenin early on framed his proposals in both political and economic terms, calling for "the right to free political separation from the oppressor nation."⁹ (Note that self-determination is espoused in ICESCR Part I Article 1, (1)-(3).) Holding tight to the Marxist line, Lenin in *State and Revolution*, as well as the *Report to the First Congress of the Third International (1919)*, demanded a proletarian dictatorship as essential to bringing "the working class closer to the machinery of the state" and ending the political and economic exploitation of the "toiling classes."¹⁰ (Again, see Article 4 of the ICESCR.) Following the tsar's abdication in February 1917, Russia under the Provisional Government took on many characteristics of a burgeoning democracy, one where

Presidents, Parliaments, and Policy, ed. Stephan Haggard and Mathew D. McCubbins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, *Local Heroes: The Political Economy of Russian Regional Governance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁶ Steven C. Thomas, "China's Movement to Resolve Citizen/Government Conflicts," in *Justice without Violence*, ed. Paul Wehr, Heidi Burgess, and Guy Burgess (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994).

⁷ Winston E. Langley, *Encyclopedia of Human Rights since 1945* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999).

⁸ Fidel Castro, *History Will Absolve Me* (www.marxists.org, 2001 [cited 6 March 2012]); available from <http://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm>.

⁹ Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (London: Foreign Language Printing House, 1961), 146.

¹⁰ Walter Laqueur and Barry M. Rubin, *The Human Rights Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 87.

free speech was frequently exercised. Lenin, however, found advantage in the government's inability to provide basic, and largely economic, demands, highlighted by his slogan "Peace, Land, and Bread!"¹¹ He promised to create from Russia, a rural backwater, a new, technologically sophisticated and prosperous state.¹²

As Lenin had before him, Mao made land issues central to his bid for power, warning more than 20 years before coming to power that "several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm" and "sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants and evil gentry into their graves."¹³ Mao demanded the end to China's feudal system, calling out for "All Power to the Peasant Associations!" In the agitation process, Mao inspired the creation of powerful peasant associations that, through revolt, became the sole organs of authority in the Chinese countryside.¹⁴ By 1947, Mao had amassed approximately 100 million fighters, many of whom rallied around his promises that "all land of landlords in the village, all public land, shall be taken over by the village peasants' associations, and together with the other village lands, in accordance with the total population of the village, irrespective of male or female, young or old, shall be unified and equally distributed."¹⁵ Mao's demands were similar to those later found in Articles 3, 7(i), and 7(ii) of the ICESCR, and he promised that dispossessed landlords would be provided with as much as everyone else.¹⁶

Implementation of Mao's pre-revolution agrarian program meant the confiscation of an estimated \$20 billion in property and the overthrow of landlords in 'liberated areas', but it also facilitated peasant revolts all around the country.¹⁷ The slogan summarizing Mao's land reform between 1945-1949, "From the masses, to the masses," helped generate enormous enthusiasm and ignite demonstrations far beyond the area his forces controlled.¹⁸ Another slogan, "Equally Divide the Land!," helped Mao frame the war as one between the (economically and politically) oppressed and the oppressor.¹⁹ After attaining power, Mao launched a popular anti-corruption campaign (under the slogan

¹¹ George Katkov and Harold Shukman, *Lenin's Path to Power: Bolshevism and the Destiny of Russia* (London: Macdonald, 1971), 78.

¹² Lenin, *Collected Works*, 612.

¹³ Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 1 (Peking: Foreign Languages, 1967), 23-4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵ William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (University of California Press, 1997), 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 608. Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Works*, New York: International Publishers, 1954, Vol. IV, (p. 113) Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, 10.

¹⁹ Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, 8-9.

“Wash Your Face”).²⁰ As in the Soviet Union, though, the reality in communist China was from the start enormous political and civil rights violations.²¹

Castro, the last of these three communist revolutionaries, had his own awakening only in law school, where he began to write anti-colonial, populist speeches.²² His first overt move into the political space was his involvement in the newly launched Cuban People’s Party (PPC), which was founded on a platform of anti-corruption, dignity and loyalty to Cuba.²³ Castro strengthened his anti-government reputation by repudiating the state for its inability to provide basic security in the face of rising powerful criminal gangs.²⁴ Soon, Castro was demanding land reform for the peasants and the return of the country’s wealth from foreign hands. He railed against racial discrimination and failures in the public health system, and he endeared himself to the destitute by defending a slum area slated to be replaced by a public square.²⁵ Following Fulgencio Batista’s violent rise to power in 1952, Castro initiated a revolutionary movement that defined itself through an anti-corruption platform that would restore dignity to the population.²⁶

The Cuban revolution culminated at the end of 1958 and, once in power, Castro sought to maintain supporter mobilization by focusing on economic rights.²⁷ He made clear his people’s economic grievances, recalling that 600,000 remained unemployed, more than half lived in makeshift shacks or slums without sanitation or electricity, and more than one-third of the population was illiterate.²⁸ Like Mao, Castro promised land reform to the estimated 200,000 peasant families lacking land for essential crops.²⁹ He also put a heavy emphasis on providing health, educational opportunities and social security to all.³⁰

Mobilization in each of these cases was based on public demands primarily for economic rights, but rights that revolutionaries made plain could not materialize without basic political change. While it is rather obvious that communists sought power based on economic grievances (the heart of Marxism),

²⁰ Ibid., 238-9.

²¹ BMJ, "China's Great Famine: 40 Years Later," *British Medical Journal* 319 (1999).

²² Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), 84-94.

²³ Ibid., 97.

²⁴ Ibid., 98-9.

²⁵ Ibid., 142.

²⁶ Ibid., 159.

²⁷ Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Revolutionary Change in Cuba* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1971), 25.

²⁸ Fidel Castro, Martin Kenner, and James F. Petras, *Fidel Castro Speaks* (New York: Grove, 1969), 7.

²⁹ Ibid., 12-3.

³⁰ Ibid., 23.

the point here is that the demands they made were popularized by their innate character: they were sold as human rights the incumbents had failed to provide.

Tragically, these revolutionaries were soon responsible for egregious rights abuses. They may have mobilized around economic rights but they were certainly selective in those they provided (for example, no property protections). And political rights of communist states have ranged from the flawed to the atrocious. In Communist Eurasia (the focus of the next section), Stalinism, which lasted until the early 1950s, marked the worst period of rights abuses, when political imprisonment, torture and state-sponsored killings occurred regularly. Political and civil rights violations continued in the post-totalitarian period (after 1956), though outright repression mutated into more subtle forms of state control over society, including a strong police presence and large informant networks to keep opposition in check. Scholars have referred to the post-totalitarian period throughout the region as “civilized violence”³¹ or “selective repression,”³² ranging from workplace dismissals and bans on foreign travel to the destruction of property, as well as more isolated cases of death threats and abductions reserved for the regime’s most feared opponents. State censorship of the media and culture was also used to prevent political discontents from gaining momentum. Most citizens of post-Stalinist communist states could usually, by keeping a low political profile, avoid harsh repression.

If the communists came to power promising greater economic rights, they did not entirely fail. In fact, communist leaders maintained power for more than 40 years through a strategy that blended overt repression of oppositionists noted above with economic bones for those who stayed quiet. Economic rights were by no means equitably provided; many lost their property and even their lives when they or their families refused to cooperate with the new regime or were simply considered overly privileged prior to communist rule. And in contrast to the great many facing periodic shortages of a variety of consumer goods, those connected to the ruling regime were often able to acquire otherwise unavailable luxury goods. Still, it is hard to deny the benefits that became available to practically all under the new regime, from cradle to grave social protections to assured vacations. This emphasis on state-provided economic rights, in conjunction with the regime’s consistent propaganda efforts, fundamentally shaped human rights values in the communist states.³³

³¹ Jacques Rupnik, "Totalitarianism Revisited," in *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, ed. John Keane (New York: Verso, 1988), 277.

³² Andrzej Paczkowski, "Poland, the “Enemy Nation”," in *The Black Book of Communism*, ed. Stephane Courtois, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 384.

³³ Tony Evans, *U.S. Hegemony and the Project of Universal Human Rights* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), Mary Kaldor and Ivan Vejvoda, "Democratization in Central and East European Countries," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 73, no. 1

Given this economic orientation, and the expectations it created, it is not entirely surprising that economic demands, more than political ones, played such an important role in the various Central European uprisings that were eventually quashed by the ruling communist authorities. In June 1956, Polish workers became the first to take to the streets in the town of Poznań. Their grievances were multi-faceted, but central to them were living conditions, which fell far short of state propaganda. Workers at several factories rejected a system of higher taxes on the most productive workers and attacked elevated production quotas, eventually taking their complaints all the way to Warsaw. When hastily proposed government promises were quickly broken, the workers launched a strike and protests in central Poznań, which attracted even more people demanding everything from wage increases and improved worker conditions to lower food prices. Ultimately, Poland's June uprising ended in dozens dead, as thousands of Polish troops worked to quell the movement.

Despite Poznań's brutal culmination, just months later another uprising took place in Budapest (Hungary), when student demonstrations against a range of political and economic conditions quickly turned into a much broader opposition movement. As in Poland, Hungarians had an array of grievances, but the backdrop was clearly political. According to the Budapest-based Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, real incomes during the first several years of communism had fallen 20%, and policies such as forced industrialization and collectivization led to a sharp decline in living standards; by 1956 the living standard was below that of 1938.³⁴ People were subjected to extremely poor housing conditions, shortages of goods were common and working conditions were dangerous and rewarded with low pay, especially for younger workers. As in Poland, the uprising led to a harsh crackdown, this time by Soviet troops and with the casualty count in the thousands.

The Poles and Hungarians launched the first popular attacks against the economic shortcomings of the communist system, but theirs was not the last. Following a long economic decline that had begun in the early 1960s, citizens in Czechoslovakia were the next to lash out against the system. Again, a central element of the 1968 Prague Spring was decentralization of the economy. A wave of subsequent uprisings in Poland, including along the Baltic Coast (1970), Radom (1976) and with the rise of Solidarity (1980), were all protests that hinged on socio-economic conditions, whether in or out of the workplace.

Where demands for the realization of promised economic rights drove rebellion, those exclusively for enhanced political rights tended to fall flat. This is

(1997), Oliver MacDonald, "The Polish Vortex: Solidarity and Socialism," *New Left Review*, no. 139 (1983).

³⁴ Institute, *1. Lesson: Crisis and a Search for Solutions* (2012 [cited 6 March 2012]); available from http://www.rev.hu/history_of_56/oral/index.htm.

evidenced by the fact that dissident movements active during less dire economic times seem to have had fairly little resonance domestically. Despite the fact that many average Czechs and Slovaks proved in 1968 to be willing to take on the regime – with knowledge of the violent repercussions a few years prior in neighboring Hungary and Poland – they did not protest en masse throughout most of the 1970s and 1980s. This is surprising given the prominence of Czechoslovakia's Charter 77, composed of dissidents who criticized the state for failing to respect (political and civil) human rights guarantees made through the 1975 Helsinki Accords. Despite this active dissident community, the Czechs and Slovaks were actually among the last of Central Europe's populations to rise up against the communists in the late 1980s.

A more detailed examination of Poland's anti-regime movement helps to explain this phenomenon. As Charter 77 was strengthening, so were various human rights groups in Poland, including the Movement for the Defense of Human and Civic Rights (ROPCIO), the Helsinki Committee, and the Committee for the Protection of Workers (KOR). The activities of KOR, arguably the strongest of these groups, highlight the difficulty of mobilizing around primarily political grievances. KOR provided financial and legal assistance to the repressed,³⁵ but it also worked to increase societal awareness of injustices should read "(documenting and publicizing rights abuses domestically, through samizdat (independent, underground publications)),³⁶ and internationally.³⁷ KOR activists served as informal organizational advisors to factory workers, where they encouraged workers to form their own informal structures that would compete with communist institutions.³⁸ But when it came to mobilization, KOR, similarly to the other organizations noted above, had little direct appeal. Polish workers were drawn to human rights organizations primarily in the name of workplace empowerment, but shied away from the broader and less tangible political goals espoused by these groups.

Unlike those more political human rights organizations, which worked for years without effectively mobilizing the masses, Solidarność (henceforth Solidarity) lit up the country. Led in 1980 by shipyard electrician Lech Wałęsa, Solidarity was originally formed to protest the firing of an independent union activist, Anna Walentynowicz, but it was fueled by economic crisis, including a

³⁵ Grzegorz Bakuniak and Krzysztof Nowak, "The Creation of a Collective Identity in a Social Movement: The Case of 'Solidarnosc' in Poland," *Theory and Society* 16, no. 3 (1987).

³⁶ Robert Zuzowski, *Political Dissent and Opposition in Poland: The Workers' Defense Committee 'KOR'* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 97.

³⁷ Leszek Kolakowski, "The Intelligentsia," in *Poland, Genesis of a Revolution*, ed. Abraham Brumberg (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), Danuta Przywara, December 9 2003, Zbigniew Romaszewski, January 19 2004.

³⁸ Janina Frentzel-Zagorska, "Civil Society in Poland and Hungary," *Soviet Studies* 42, no. 4 (1990).

recent hike in food prices. Solidarity demanded the fulfillment of economic rights preached by the communists. According to Solidarity's 1981 program, the group "sprang from the people's needs," rooted in economic deprivation.³⁹ As Solidarity's broad economic demands reached all corners of Poland, it outgrew its union beginnings and turned into a grassroots movement numbering 10 million that, Solidarity leaders claimed, "reflects the desires and aspirations of Polish society."⁴⁰ Solidarity turned into an extraordinarily heterogeneous opposition movement, including blue-collar workers, peasants and intellectuals, populists and conservatives, liberals and radicals.

As was the case in all of the earlier uprisings discussed, from the communists to the early anti-communists, those opposing the incumbents cast themselves as human rights agents. Although they primarily argued for the realization of economic rights – those that attracted the greatest public support – they also all had an important political message. Just as communist revolutionaries had made clear political change was essential to realizing promised economic rights, so did Solidarity activists. "For none of us was it just a question of material conditions," Solidarity's leaders wrote in their final days of freedom before the December 1981 communist crackdown. "History has taught us that there can be no bread without freedom."⁴¹

Perhaps because the communists had long promised economic rights, Solidarity, like smaller predecessor movements throughout the region, never in its first years adopted a strictly revolutionary role, instead accepting the lead role of the Communist Party. Solidarity wanted to hold the regime to account for its promises and, to do so, demanded not regime change, but freedom for independent workers unions. Poland's communist regime met Solidarity demands with a mix of repression and, as had become customary, promised reforms. After nearly a year and a half of tussling, General Wojciech Jaruzelski finally implemented martial law in December 1981, arresting thousands of Solidarity activists. While Solidarity continued to function underground, it had little more than a skeleton presence in the workplace. Promised reforms were, without union pressure, never completely implemented.

It was during this post-1981 underground period that former KOR members, and intellectuals from other human rights organizations mentioned above (in addition to a newer one, the Commission for Intervention and Rule of Law NSZZ Solidarność), once again took the lead role. By organizing educational groups, discussion clubs, publishing activities and charity organizations, these activists helped Solidarity survive in the underground and later played a key role

³⁹ Solidarity, "The Solidarity Program," in *The Solidarity Sourcebook*, ed. Stan Persky and Henry Flam (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1982).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁴¹ Solidarity, "The Solidarity Program," 205.

in the infamous Roundtable negotiations that ushered in the end of European communism. Despite these activities, Solidarity's popularity declined during the underground period, when it appeared unable to press the government to provide expected economic rights. Already, Solidarity had begun to lose its shine in the pre-clampdown days as the movement faced off against the authorities for not weeks or months, but nearly a year and a half. Fatigue, coupled with Solidarity's practical disappearance after 1981, left the number of Poles identifying themselves with Solidarity down from more than one-third in 1981 to just over one-fifth in the mid-1980s.⁴²

Solidarity's resurgence in 1988 was sparked not by Poland's political excesses during the previous years, but by a series of price hikes designed to keep the state above water for a bit longer. Despite the fact that this newest wave of strikes was largely spontaneous, small in scale and involved a new leadership, the strikers drew on Solidarity's past experiences and claimed to act on behalf of the whole country. The new activists were unified by their loyalty to Solidarity's historical leader, Lech Walesa, and broader sentiment to the Solidarity tradition. The strikes were welcomed by former Solidarity members, who quickly returned to the organization, with Walesa retaking the helm. The strikers came out again that August, as Solidarity's approval ratings suddenly rebounded. Under pressure, authorities proposed a series of Roundtable Talks that would ultimately last eight weeks and lead to the country's first semi-free elections in mid-1989.

In summary, the revolutionaries that brought communism to various parts of the world, and the mass movements that ended it in Eurasia, effectively mobilized around broad demands for increased economic and social rights.⁴³ Whether or not the leaders would ultimately prove to be the human rights agents they sold themselves as, those who supported them were primarily motivated by a basket of economic rights they felt was inadequately provided under the old order. Lenin, Mao, Castro, and then the anti-communist Wałęsa, were all human rights agents, demanding new political systems to remedy perceived shortcomings in the delivery of what they presented as economic rights. Their adversaries were clearly the incumbents, but they skillfully found allies in populations that became convinced these rights abuses (rather than the civil liberties long denied to them) were worth fighting for.

⁴² Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 113, Harald Wydra, *Continuities in Poland's Permanent Transition* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England] New York: Macmillan Press; St. Martin's Press, 2000), 144.

⁴³ Of course, there were other important variables, among the most prominent was ethnic/national identity. Many of the nascent social movements were actually rooted in environmental demands, which also fall into the ICESCR rubric (Article 12).

AFTER COMMUNISM: WHERE HAVE OUR ECONOMIC RIGHTS GONE?

Communist citizens may have gained regime change in the name of facilitating the deliver of economic rights, but they were welcomed into a western dominated world where those rights had little value. Since the advent of the current human rights regime in the mid-20th century, political and civil rights have been dominant. In many ways this is inconsistent with both the spirit and letter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which promised equality for all rights, which would eventually be enshrined in the two separate covenants.⁴⁴ As Alam notes, "the full realization of one category of human rights depends on the realization of the other."⁴⁵ Political rights were primarily classified as negative rights, those that are delivered by freedom from interference.⁴⁶ These were seen as more feasible to provide than positive rights, which equate to entitlements to something. Yet negative rights also involve significant state resources. For instance, to protect society from modern day slavery, the state must maintain an apparatus that includes persons and institutions ranging from labor inspectors and police to courts and prisons.⁴⁷

The very act of breaking down human rights into two separate covenants was divisive and a function of the international dominance of western states, focused primarily on political and civil rights. Economic, social and cultural rights were seen as aspirations and goals that, both costly and imprecise, could be achieved only gradually.⁴⁸ Political rights were accorded primary status, with economic rights branded "second generation."⁴⁹ This had implications for the evolution of state preferences, but also for those of western non-state organizations, which were historically reticent to support those abroad fighting for "subsistence rights" long opposed by their states.⁵⁰ Slowly, various western

⁴⁴ Shawkat Alam, "Economic Globalization: Rethinking Its Promises for Economic and Social Development from a Developing Country Perspective," in *Globalisation and the Quest for Social and Environmental Justice: The Relevance of International Law in an Evolving World Order*, ed. Shawkat Alam, Natalie Klein, and Juliet Overland (New York: Routledge, 2011), 78.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Shareen Hertel and Lanse Minkler, "Economic Rights: The Terrain," in *Economic Rights: Conceptual, Measurement, and Policy Issues*, ed. Shareen Hertel and Lanse Minkler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁸ Mashood A. Baderin and Rober McCorquodale, "The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Forty Years of Development," in *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Action*, ed. Mashood A. Baderin and Rober McCorquodale (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Danniell Chong, "Economic Rights and Extreme Poverty: Moving toward Subsistence," in *The International Struggle for New Human Rights*, ed. Clifford Bob (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 113.

NGOs have begun to adopt or endorse economic rights. These include anti-poverty groups, but also traditionally politically oriented organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.⁵¹

In the dying days of the Cold War, however, these processes still in their infancy today had yet to begin. At the same time, the situation after 1989 made even plainer the important role of economic rights in the most recent mobilizations. As new political and economic systems were implanted, launching the post-communist world into what Swidler (1986) calls an “unsettled” period of social transition, citizens found a new opportunity to assess previously held beliefs. This was a period of political learning,⁵² where those living in post-communist states contrasted the old and new systems, and often began to second-guess the recent transition.

In contrast to the “tranquil life” of average citizens under communism (whose outward support of the communist regime kept them largely out of trouble), an imposed exchange of economic for political rights after 1989 left large elements of the population embittered, and challenged key rights values. Already in the early 1990s there was strong resistance to economic policies that quickly created a stark separation between winners and losers.⁵³ Even if pure egalitarianism was nothing more than a slogan under communism, the contrast between haves and have-nots became much sharper under the new system.⁵⁴ Citizens in practically every post-communist country witnessed economic deterioration, characterized by increased unemployment, rising inflation and worsening social services, though the rate of decline and recovery varied widely by state.⁵⁵

Within a short period, studies began to raise questions as to just how much publics truly supported democratic ideals after being simultaneously dragged through economic reforms. Some studies indicated ambivalent attitudes towards democratic rule in post-communist countries,⁵⁶ with democratic principles preached by former opposition members ringing hollow in the face of certain

⁵¹ Ibid., 109.

⁵² Nancy Bermeo, “Democracy and the Lessons of Dictatorship,” *Comparative Politics* 24, no. 3 (1992): 283, Christian Joppke, “Revisionism, Dissidence, Nationalism: Opposition in Leninist Regimes,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 4 (1994).

⁵³ George Schopflin, “Post-Communism: Constructing New Democracies in Central Europe,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 67, no. 2 (1991).

⁵⁴ Jane Curry, “The Sociological Legacies of Communism,” in *The Legacy of Communism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zoltan Barany and Ivan Volgyes (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

⁵⁵ Gerard Roland, “The Political Economy of Transition,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 16, no. 1 (2002).

⁵⁶ G. Evans and S. Whitefield, “The Politics and Economics of Democratic Commitment: Support for Democracy in Transition Societies,” *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 4 (1995).

overpowering economic tensions.⁵⁷ Democracy was simultaneously held up as the flag of equality and a justification for the economic degradation of some social groups. As former opposition elites converted their political capital into lucrative government positions, they served as personifications of what was wrong with the new system.⁵⁸

These sentiments no doubt contributed to the many quick electoral rebounds by post-communist parties and blocks around the former communist world.⁵⁹ Many leading scholars were wary of media reports of “nostalgia” but chose different methods for criticizing them. Some noted a number of other variables resulting in post-communist shows of strength (including fragmentation of other political alternatives, high mandatory electoral thresholds, or citizens voting *against* the ruling elites rather than *for* the communists), while others said there could be no nostalgia since average residents “have very negative recent memories of a totalitarian alternative.”⁶⁰ An assessment of why post-oppositionists lost out to post-communists in the early 1990s is beyond the scope of this paper. But such statements, given the fact that few still alive in Central Europe or the former Soviet Union could recall life in a totalitarian state and that a vast majority of citizens (65%-80%) claimed to have rarely or never been personally subject to injustice under communism,⁶¹ demonstrate an incomplete understanding of human rights attitudes and their influence on the new democratic state.

To the extent that the anti-communist movements mobilized around political rights, they effectively did so because most presumed political change would lead to greater economic rights, as well. As in the communist period, one set of rights quickly trumped the other. Citizens who had once been advocates of political rights showed their discontent by churning out government after government, altering the political elites at the helm. A saving grace for those post-communist states further west was that they were soon offered substantial economic rewards for their democratic performance – European Union entry –

⁵⁷ A.M. Cirtautas and E. Mokrzycki, "The Articulation and Institutionalization of Democracy in Poland," *Social Research* 60, no. 4 (1990).

⁵⁸ Adam Michnik, "Reflections on the Collapse of Communism," *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 1 (2000), J.M. Nelson, "Linkages between Politics and Economics," *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 4 (1994).

⁵⁹ J. Fidrmuc, "Economics of Voting in Post-Communist Countries," *Electoral Studies* 19, no. 2-3 (2000).

⁶⁰ Raymond Duch, "Economic Chaos and the Fragility of Democratic Transition in Former Communist Regimes," *The Journal of Politics* 57, no. 1 (1995): 126.

⁶¹ David S. Mason, "Attitudes Towards the Market and Political Participation in the Post-Communist States," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 2 (1995): 398, David S. Mason and Svetlana Sidorenko-Stephenson, "Public Opinion and the 1996 Elections in Russia: Nostalgic and Statist, yet Pro-Market and Pro-Yeltsin," *Slavic Review* 56, no. 4 (1997).

which made the pain of this greater focus on political rights more bearable for citizens seeing enormous carrots on the horizon. For many states further east, where EU entry was less feasible and the rewards of democracy thus less tangible, the democratic regimes withered under the pressure of economic rights shortcomings.

DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONS

The late 20th century anti-communist revolutionaries used the increasingly 'legitimate' norm of democracy to demand a range of rights. But they also helped to solidify the place of democracy in the human rights and revolutionary lexicon. It is of little surprise that a series of regime changes that have taken place since the late 1990s have been billed as 'democratic revolutions'; these are the sorts that receive broad international support and even assistance. It is perhaps similarly unsurprising that many of these 'revolutions' have resulted in very little substantive change and led to the hasty alienation of one-time supporters.

One might argue that the democratic transformations of Eastern Europe were a de facto acknowledgement by communists and oppositionists alike that democracy could be equated with legitimacy, both externally and internally. We can define legitimacy as behavior in accordance with "generally accepted principles of right process"⁶² or "prevailing norms of appropriate conduct."⁶³ Since the end of World War II there evolved a broad consensus on the international stage – spurred by a process of socialization at the top – that democratic principles, including leaders having the consent of the citizens whom they govern, were essential to membership.⁶⁴ This dominance of the democratic paradigm at the top has reverberated down to the domestic level and prompted even non-democracies to dress themselves up, in terms of both rhetoric and institutional shells, to play that part.⁶⁵ Eastern European revolutions were both a

⁶² Thomas M. Franck, *The Power of Legitimacy among Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 19.

⁶³ John T. Jost and Brenda Major, "Emerging Perspectives on the Psychology of Legitimacy," in *The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging Perspectives on Ideology, Justice, and Intergroup Relations*, ed. John T. Jost and Brenda Major (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4.

⁶⁴ Ian Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 181, Rodger A. Payne and Nayef H. Samhat, *Democratizing Global Politics : Discourse Norms, International Regimes, and Political Community, Suny Series in Global Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 1, Jens Steffek, "Legitimacy in International Relations: From State Compliance to Citizen Consensus," in *Legitimacy in an Age of Global Politics*, ed. Achim Hurrelmann, Steffen Schneider, and Jens Steffek (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 185.

⁶⁵ Larry Jay Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002), Ronald L. Lepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity, and

function and a confirmation of democratic legitimacy. As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen noted, "when people look back at what happened in this century, they will find it difficult not to accord primacy to the emergence of democracy as the preeminently acceptable form of governance."⁶⁶

The Eastern Europeans were obviously not alone in the third wave of democratization. In well-known cases of citizens fighting against oppression in 'pro-democracy movements', many movement followers were motivated by a fundamental deficit in economic rights, which could not be resolved without political change. In South Africa, where the pro-democracy struggle was against a brutal and racist regime, civil society actors mobilized their populations around day-to-day demands that they subsequently linked to the broader national struggle.⁶⁷ Unionists, who occupied a very strong place in South Africa's African National Congress, sought spaces on the ANC ticket during the first free elections in 1994 in order to "ensure the ANC met the needs of the people."⁶⁸ In Chile, where anti-Pinochet mobilization was particularly effective in slum areas, movement leaders were subsequently befuddled by democracy without economic rights. As a leader of one movement organization commented, "it is very difficult to walk the line between supporting democracy and fighting for the rights that have not yet been given to us. The regime has changed, and we have to support the democratic process, even if it is not exactly what we had hoped it would be."⁶⁹

While economic grievances appear to have prompted broad mobilization in all of these cases, those leading the anti-regime battle played up their democratic aspirations. Social movement organization leaders, to be successful, must convince large numbers of people that the organization goals are close to their own.⁷⁰ Many of those groups that come to back pro-democracy organizations do so only as they find their own members disadvantaged by economic policies of the governing regime.⁷¹ Democratic revolutions, like other rites of passage, can "give people a sense of efficacy and the energy to solve

Culture in National Security," in *The Culture of National Security : Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 58.

⁶⁶ Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 3 (2002): 4.

⁶⁷ Martin J. Murray, *Revolution Deferred: The Painful Birth of Post-Apartheid South Africa* (London ; New York: Verso, 1994), 169.

⁶⁸ K. Von Holdt, *Transition from Below: Forging Trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2003), 189.

⁶⁹ Patricia L. Hipsher, "Democratic Transitions and Social Movement Outcomes: The Chilean Shantytown Dwellers' Movement in Comparative Perspective," in *From Contention to Democracy*, ed. Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 161.

⁷⁰ Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash, "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change," *Social Forces* 44, no. 3 (1966): 333.

⁷¹ E. Remi Aiyede, "The Dynamics of Civil Society and the Democratization Process in Nigeria," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003): 15.

problems.”⁷² The tandem nature of political and economic rights has motivated some external civil society support, with the understanding that democratically administered states will better serve those politically but also economically marginalized under the non-democratic incumbents.⁷³

Certainly, those who took the lead in the massive pro-democracy demonstrations that led to regime change in Serbia (which became a template of sorts for many that followed), Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan trumpeted political demands and used severe electoral shortcomings to frame the popular mobilization effort as one of disenfranchisement. But arguably the most popular slogans of the day were those calling for an end to corruption and better economic management. It is telling that as much as Serbs despised their deposed tyrant, Slobodan Milošević, relatively few were concerned by his purported record of severe human rights abuses and humanitarian law violations (including crimes against humanity and genocide). In fact, as the post-Milošević government sought to transfer Milošević to sit trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, only 11% supported the policy.⁷⁴ A majority (59%), however, said he should face criminal prosecution at home for “abuse of office,” especially corruption.

In Georgia, where protesters involved in the 2003 anti-Shevardnadze mobilization demanded free and fair elections, the new replacement government’s focus on transitional justice was also primarily an anti-corruption drive.⁷⁵ “Scratching beneath the Rose Revolution’s surface, this is not a surprise. As a longtime NGO trainer in Georgia noted, one central role that NGOs played in the 2003 events was mobilizing the population against corruption.”⁷⁶ Another scholar, and head of Georgia’s Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, acknowledged that the Rose Revolution was precipitated by an implicit message from Shevardnadze and his cronies that “Yes, we are bad, our government will always be corrupt, and there is no real order...”⁷⁷ The same was true a year later in Ukraine where, according to a Council on Foreign Relations

⁷² Charles H. Jr. Fairbanks, "Revolution Reconsidered," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 1 (2007): 56.

⁷³ Julie Hearn and Mark Robinson, "Civil Society and Democracy Assistance in Africa," in *Democracy Assistance*, ed. Peter Burnell (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 244.

⁷⁴ Peter Ford, "Serbs Still Ignore Role in Atrocity," *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 11 2002, David Holley, "Serbs Face Their Past, Dose of Truth at a Time," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17 2001.

⁷⁵ Laurence Broers, "After the 'Revolution': Civil Society and the Challenges of Consolidating Democracy in Georgia," *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 3 (2005): 346.

⁷⁶ Nino Saakashvili, July 16 2007.

⁷⁷ Ghia Nodia, "Breaking the Mold of Powerlessness: The Meaning of Georgia's Latest Revolution," in *Enough!: The Rose Revolution in the Republic of Georgia 2003*, ed. Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch (Nova Science Pub Inc, 2005), 104.

report, anti-incumbent mobilization was secured by opposition promises to “reform Ukraine's notoriously corrupt government, improve the economy, and reorient the country toward Europe and away from Russia.”⁷⁸ One of the central players in Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution acknowledged more or less the same, noting that young people who helped turn out the incumbent authoritarian in 2005 “said enough is enough, all this bribery and corruption.”⁷⁹

All of these revolutions had much to do with political rights; democratic systems promise to do a better job deterring corruption and encouraging the provision of political goods thanks to their focus on accountability and rule of law. But there is no escaping the fact that opposition mobilization was facilitated by a perceived shortcoming in economic rights. In other post-communist countries where the threat of a color revolution loomed large in the eyes of their leaders, it appears economic failure was also a critical factor. For instance, the 2005 Andijan protests in Uzbekistan that led to a government massacre were, on their face, prompted by the political trial of alleged religious extremists. In fact, many of those protesting were precisely those who had lost their jobs or the charitable handouts from those 23 local businessmen on trial.⁸⁰ It is telling that a long list of other political trials has received very little attention (before or after Andijan), and certainly not the same level of public mobilization.

The political outcomes in each of these cases of regime change, while far better than in the communist revolutions discussed earlier in this paper, have still been quite dismal. Rather than a full-fledged political opening, politically stagnant or even increasingly repressive new elites have prompted internal and external observers to re-label each of the revolutions with qualifying words such as “wilted” “dying” or “rotten”. According to Georgia's Freedom House scores, for instance, Georgia's progress in democratization was nil in the first year after democratic breakthrough and, after very minor improvements that never brought it beyond a rating of “partly free,” reverted back to late Shevardnadze-era levels by 2008.⁸¹ This first of the most recent color revolutions is perhaps an indicator that camouflaging what is essentially an economic revolt in political terms does little to bring about the political changes promised. Unfortunately, without democratic consolidation, many of the economic demands also remain unsatisfied.

⁷⁸ Lionel Beehner, *One Year after Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution'* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2005 [cited 29 February 2012]); available from <http://www.cfr.org/ukraine/one-year-after-ukraines-orange-revolution/p9259>.

⁷⁹ Jill Dougherty, "The 'Tulip Revolution' Meets the 'Arab Spring'," *CNN*, April 21 2011.

⁸⁰ Jenny Norton, "Uzbekistan's Most Orderly Protest," *BBC*, 12 May 2005.

⁸¹ The scores were 4,4 from 2000 to 2004; 3,4 in 2005; 3,3 in 2006 and 2007; and 4,4 in 2008 and 2009.

In the most recent spate of pro-democracy revolutions in the Middle East, like in those that occurred in the preceding decade (discussed above), the catalyst was also primarily economic. Sure, political injustice was on the face of the revolutions, one of which was allegedly spurred by an unaccountable market inspector's humiliating slap of a Tunisian merchant.⁸² But the slogans that came to dominate the protests against President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali were primarily economic, prompting the president's economic response: apart from dismissing the interior minister, who took the blame for shooting demonstrators, his primary counter-opposition strategy was to reduce sugar, milk and bread prices.⁸³ In nearby Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak reacted similarly to massive protests against poverty, unemployment and corruption, promising to strengthen the economy and bring down the unemployment rate.⁸⁴ A key demand of protesters, the resignation of Mubarak, was designed to open up space for an honest leader who would provide these goods more effectively.

DISCUSSION

Those amassing in the streets of Prague in 1968, Gdańsk (home of Solidarity) in 1980 and Moscow in 1991 were actually quite similar in their demands as those occupying the central squares of Tbilisi in 2003, Kiev in 2004 and even Cairo in 2010. True, signs in the latter demanded the departure of the rotten regime in favor of a new democracy. But behind the signs were a plethora of less grandiose and far more basic grievances, including greater transparency and less corruption, higher wages and more jobs. Democracy, with its overwhelming focus on political and civil rights, was to many allies of these movements – and agents alike – less an end goal than a means to enhanced economic and social rights.

The agents of human rights in all these late 20th and early 21st century cases seem to have been selling a product, political change, that they hoped to convince their populations meant both legitimacy and prosperity. On the former count, democracy had over the 20th century emerged on the international stage as *the* legitimate form of governance, a perception that was symbolized in the numerous repressive states that referred to themselves as 'democratic' or 'peoples' states. This reverberated down to the local level: Most citizens knew that what they had was not democracy, which was the ideal. A 'democratic revolution' was a rightful one.

⁸² Elizabeth Day, "Fedia Hamdi's Slap Which Sparked a Revolution 'Didn't Happen'," *The Guardian*, 23 April 2011.

⁸³ Richard Spencer, "Tunisia Riots: Reform or Be Overthrown, Us Tells Arab States Amid Fresh Riots," *Telegraph (UK)*, January 13 2011.

⁸⁴ AlJazeera, *Timeline: Egypt's Revolution* (2011 [cited March 6 2012]); available from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html>.

Opposition political elites promised democracy, but they also promised prosperity. The product they offered had all the glamour of a Rolls Royce body. The target market, society, was eager to dump its cramped Yugo for something that promised a more comfortable future. There was an underlying assumption that if it looks like a Rolls it will drive like the sort of Rolls cruising around beyond the repressive state's borders. A crass version of the calculus would be: Democracy = West = economic stability. Indeed, this was partially and retrospectively revealed in the early years of the post-communist transition, when harsh economic realities eclipsed citizen concerns about their right to voice opposition, contributing to the electoral defeat of communism's one-time opponents and the resurrection of post-communists around the region. Political liberties are nice, one Polish citizen wrote to her newspaper during the early transition economic crisis, but "what is freedom when a person is constantly fasting?"⁸⁵

While counterfactuals are hard to prove, one lesson here is that by framing their demands in the language of economic rights, many of the regime changes we witnessed might well have been even more popular and taken place even earlier. This is not to suggest they would not have had democratic goals and outcomes, but that they could have been framed in a more direct and immediately appealing way for potential allies in the populace. What might have happened if Charter 77 or Helsinki Watch in the late 1970s had instead of targeting its reports to the international community, most concerned with political imprisonments, torture and extra-judicial murder, focused its reports on local corruption and made a more concerted effort to disperse those reports domestically? If economic rights truly enjoy a primacy, as the mobilization efforts discussed in this paper suggest, then there are real policy implications for today.

Take, for instance, the case of Uzbekistan's beleaguered opposition movement.⁸⁶ Since the mid-1990s, excluded political oppositionists in one of the world's most repressive states have found sanctuary in exile or in human rights organization shells at home. Many of these activists have had to put aside the economic grievances they once voiced in order to focus on the political grievances that are better able to ensure outside (i.e., western) attention and a consistent stream of grants from western states and the international nongovernmental organizations that help them dispense their funding. These states, and especially the United States, have been pre-disposed to those opposition organizations fighting in the name of democracy. It is a classic case of resource dependency, where organizations that might have once been able to galvanize their constituents around grassroots (economic) demands have been

⁸⁵ Trybuna, "Zycie Na Goraco," *Trybuna* 1993.

⁸⁶ Brian Grodsky, "Looking for Solidarność in Central Asia: The Role of Human Rights Organizations in Political Change," *Slavic Review* 66, no. 3 (2007).

compelled toward (political) programs and activities valued more by external actors. It is an example of counter-elites unnecessarily swimming upstream and, perhaps, another case of revolution deferred.

Understanding revolutionaries and other regime opponents as human rights agents can help us more completely understand the goals of elites and non-elites alike. In this paper, I have attempted to show that across cases there appears to be a primacy of economic rights, whether in the name of communist, anti-communist or explicitly democratic movements. But in each case political change, while not the mobilizing variable, was essential to the proposed delivery of economic rights. Communist leaders demanded rule by the “vanguard of the proletariat” and pro-democracy leaders called for rule based on, among other things, free and fair elections. All of these experiences point to a basket of “basic needs” including both economic rights (such as food, shelter, education and health) as well as political ones (such as participation and identity).⁸⁷ It is the explicit or implicit promises (or the absence of promises) for the former, however, that can make or break a movement.

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⁸⁷ R.J. Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 85.

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