

**Just Rewards? Communism's Hard Bargain with the Citizen-Consumer**

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**Abstract**

The paper considers the implications of the common argument that consumption opportunities were a key to legitimacy and "normalization" in European state-socialist regimes. Such interpretations have stressed a conclusion that the people of the communist societies were, in effect, bought off by their illegitimate leaders. Whereas many Western economists, government officials, and political analysts believed that the introduction of market forces to the communist world would result in further democratization and liberalization, the historical record - including a number of influential contemporary critiques made by citizens of the communist societies themselves - suggests that a very different process may have been in operation across socialist Europe. What were typically interpreted as liberalizing gestures in socialist economies may instead have resulted in a suppression of democracy and civic engagement in political questions. I address these concerns using evidence from a variety of state-socialist polities, thereby extending to a comparative context a number of key questions arising from my research in and on the former Yugoslav federation, where the consumerist orientation proved strongest, but where the nature of any "deal" may have been obscured by the lighter touch of Titoist practice. I suggest that the historiography of communism and of the region more generally might benefit from a fresh and more sophisticated application of social-contract concepts to these questions of legitimation, pacification, popular satisfaction, and the nature of everyday life under authoritarian rule.