

the reach of self-interested actors. The results were three legal-institutional reforms that would not have been achievable through democratic channels: depoliticization; autonomization, which vests arm's-length agencies with independent decision-making authority; and, ultimately, discipline.

Arriving at technocratic guardianship entailed changes to the architecture of economic government, which Roberts documents throughout the book. Underlying these measures, however, was the expectation that change could be effected solely through legal-formal reform without regard to culture or political context—what he calls naive institutionalism. This perspective, taken by some scholars and policy-makers, assumed that only the formal structures of policy and law were relevant sites of reform. Here is the Polanyian moment. Attempts at formal-legal transformation were contested on political or socio-cultural grounds, areas excluded from the strictly institutional perspective. Meanwhile, depoliticization and autonomization undermined the democratic role of the public in public policy.

Roberts's text is not without its shortcomings. Principally, the book takes on more content than it can handle in its limited space. Attempting to theorize and present six issue areas is noble but ultimately unsatisfying. Roberts skims over multiple issues and cases in a cursory and uneven manner. For example, his chapter on autonomization of tax collection in developing countries is half the length of other chapters and comes across as incomplete. In lengthier chapters, which run about 20 pages each, most of the evidence is delivered in a descriptive and unsystematic manner. Often, he selects examples from both developed and developing countries without due regard for the logic of comparative analysis, making his evidence seem rather ad hoc. In this regard, Roberts's sporadic approach to evidence raises the spectre of confirmation bias. A more methodical approach to his evidence would have provided the empirical discipline needed to accomplish his task in such a short space. Nevertheless, naive institutionalism and the logic of discipline remain valid concepts and the normative argument about democratic participation in public decisions resonates. Roberts draws lessons about the inescapable embeddedness of politics and economics that are as vital today as they were in Polanyi's time.

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## **International history\***

**Human rights activism and the end of the Cold War.** By Sarah B. Snyder. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2011. 286pp. Index. £55.00. ISBN 978 1 10700 105 3. Available as e-book.

It was on 19 January 1989 that Bolshevism, not Menshevism, as Leon Trotsky had prophesied, ended up on the ash heap of history. On that day representatives of the 35 members of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe signed the Concluding Document of their Vienna Meeting. The signatories agreed that they would 'ensure human rights and fundamental freedoms to everyone'. They had agreed on similar commitments before, but the Vienna Concluding Document was different: all other signers had good reason to believe that the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev intended to keep its promise. It was this fundamental change in the Soviet Union's domestic policy that brought the Cold War to an end.

\* See also Marvin Kalb and Deborah Kalb, *Haunting legacy: Vietnam and the American presidency from Ford to Obama*, pp. 203–204.

*Human rights activism and the end of the Cold War*, Sarah Snyder's well-researched study, demonstrates the role played by the Helsinki Final Act in bringing democracy and respect for human rights to Eastern Europe. When he signed that agreement in 1975, Leonid Brezhnev most assuredly did not believe that he was affixing his signature to a document that would come to haunt his government and ultimately spell the end of Leninism.

Sarah Snyder correctly notes that the result produced by the Helsinki Final Act was not inevitable. It was the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev to the leadership of the Soviet Union and his commitment to the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act that made the critical difference. Gorbachev, having grown up under Stalin, may very well on the basis of personal experience have developed a distaste for totalitarianism. However, it was the Helsinki Final Act that, as this book notes, laid the foundation for the development of a human rights movement in the Soviet Union.

The development of the Soviet human rights movement was thus an unintended consequence of the Brezhnev government's pride in the result it attained with the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. As the Second World War ended without the signing of formal peace treaties that would have recognized the new borders in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union under Brezhnev made it an important foreign policy goal to persuade the West to recognize these borders. The Helsinki Final Act, as the Soviet leadership saw it, delivered that recognition, causing the Soviet propaganda apparatus to distribute the document widely.

In signing the Final Act, the Soviet leadership had also made commitments to respect human rights. But that was nothing new. The Soviet Union had a few years earlier agreed to the same principles in signing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

But the Covenant was quietly signed. Hardly any citizen knew that the Soviet Union had entered into an agreement to respect human rights. In 1977, by contrast, a great many Soviet citizens became familiar with the Helsinki Final Act and read not only what the government had wanted them to read, regarding East European borders, but also the provisions dealing with human rights. Helsinki monitoring groups formed and committed themselves to publicizing the Soviet government's violations of the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act.

In due course, repressive measures were taken against the Helsinki monitors but the genie was out of the bottle. The monitors had succeeded in getting their message out among intellectuals in the Soviet Union, including those who were part of the governmental apparatus. When Gorbachev began to open up the system, there were many other Soviet citizens, including people in leadership positions, who supported the new approach to the relationship between the government and its citizens. President Reagan and Secretary of State Shultz recognized these basic changes in the Soviet Union, changes which caused them to conclude that a solid foundation existed for a new, friendly relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. Significant agreements were reached in the field of arms control and the Cold War did indeed come to an end.

As noted earlier, this book, which describes the foregoing developments, is thoroughly researched, but some important aspects of a story can sometimes be overlooked. From the very beginning of the Reagan administration, the issue of Soviet human rights was high on the administration's agenda. President Reagan's opposition to the Helsinki Final Act, to which the book refers, was based on a narrow issue: objection to what was viewed as recognition of the incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union. Also, though the Helsinki Final Act laid the foundation for the human rights dialogue between the United States and the Soviet Union, the key reforms of 1987 and 1988 did not come out of the

Vienna Review Meeting of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, but were the product of an intensive *bilateral* Soviet–US dialogue.

*Richard Schifter*

**The most controversial decision: Truman, the atomic bombs, and the defeat of Japan.** By **Wilson D. Miscamble**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2011. 174pp. Index. Pb.: £14.99. ISBN 978 0 52173 536 0.

Drawing on the many scholarly works that discuss the reasons why President Harry S. Truman and his closest advisers considered that the use of the atomic bomb against Japan in August 1945 was a necessary measure, the circumstances that surrounded the Japanese decision to surrender, and the role that possession of the atomic bomb may have played in American diplomacy towards the Soviet Union, Wilson Miscamble has also utilized his own formidable knowledge of the primary sources to produce a wonderfully compressed and trenchantly argued book. While some of the material that he uses here will be familiar to readers of his earlier excellent study, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), Miscamble has produced a new summation that is a welcome addition to the massed ranks of works on the first use of the bomb, and does not shy away from exploring the difficult moral problems raised by that awful event.

Serving as both a primer for anyone new to the subject, and a powerful interpretation of a set of highly emotive issues, the book delivers a lucid account of American attitudes and policies at the end of the Pacific War that never pulls its punches. In particular, Miscamble shows barely concealed scorn for those historians who have engaged in revisionist work that challenges the notion that the use of the bombs was necessary to end the war, and that other factors were paramount in the minds of Truman and his officials when they contemplated how to employ the terrible new weapon that now lay in their hands. Indeed, Miscamble persuasively demonstrates that the fundamental tenets of orthodox interpretations of the atomic bomb ‘decision’—if one can call it that, for there was never a positive presidential choice made to use the bomb as such—have if anything gained more strength over the past few years. Not only has the validity of revisionist accounts been subjected to further withering criticism, most notably from Robert James Maddox; but from increased knowledge of Japanese military preparations for an Allied invasion and the debates within the Japanese leadership over the possibility of surrender, we have every reason to appreciate why Truman and his advisers would see the use of the bomb as essential to prevent further unnecessary loss of Allied lives. Miscamble is also surely right in stressing that as well as the almost unimaginable civilian suffering that would have occurred in the event of an Allied conventional invasion of Japan (far outstripping the casualties seen at Hiroshima and Nagasaki), it is important not to forget the many millions of other Asians who would have been subjected to many more months of brutal Japanese occupation if the war had been prolonged (pp. 112–15). Critics of Truman’s decision on moral grounds, Miscamble suggests, should instead direct their attention to the culpability of Japanese leaders, who had led their nation into a disastrous war; been responsible for wide-scale aggression and atrocity throughout Asia; and then seemed prepared to see their own populace endure a suicidal last stand rather than accept the reality of a hopeless military position. In this connection, the conclusions of the US Strategic Bombing Survey, published in July 1946, which speculated that Japan was already on the verge of surrender or collapse in the summer of 1945, are seen to have played an important role in stoking the early fires of revisionism, but can now be judged highly inaccurate (p. 82). Such was the effect of the survey, and notwithstanding the