

EDITORIAL NOTE

1989: Anno Mirabilis?

Surprise followed surprise, if only by the sheer rapidity of events. There seems to have been an almost Biblical aura about it all as walls came tumbling down: cement barriers were pierced, barbed wire frontiers cut open, and a measure of freedom of travel and political interaction restored a measure of contact between national minorities and the rest of the world.

Yet what is there to celebrate for the minority peoples of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union? What is the real promise of this astounding year that has stirred up the hopes of dozens of ethnic minorities? What will it usher in? What is its legacy? Is it to be the spirit of the peaceful victory of Solidarity that also helped breach the Berlin Wall? Or will it be the violence of Christmas Day in Romania, and the recent explosion of intolerance demonstrated by Orthodox Bulgarians against Muslim and Turkish Bulgarians? Is the future embodied in the quiet evolutionary revolution promoted by the Baltic peoples? Or is it suggested by the incendiary interethnic strifes raging and brewing in Transcaucasia and Yugoslavia?

The signals of 1989 for 1990 are mixed; the ambiguity of history is bittersweet. The crystal ball is, as always, clouded. Clairvoyance works only for hindsight; one can only counsel caution for 1990, in the wake of the dual legacy of 1989.

At the time of writing, events in Yugoslavia seem to encapsule the opportunities and plights awaiting national minorities. In the north, Slovenians and Croats seem to be preparing for a graceful, non-violent, but determined Baltic-like exodus from the present rigid federal structure. In the south, Kosovo's Albanians wage a chronic battle with Serbs, Muslims against Christians, reminiscent of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. As in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia's central government seems momentarily paralyzed, poised between leniency and sternness, between continued "liberalism" and a return to "conservatism." Even Czechs and Slovaks display as much anxiety as anticipation as they define their common future(s) in forging a mutually acceptable name for their country.

At the heart of all three multinational entities lie similar ingredients: deeply-rooted intolerance, the bitter legacy of bankrupt communism, moribund economies, and weak democratic traditions: none bode well for minorities. Both the Soviet macro-multinational

entity and the Yugoslavian and Czechoslovakian micro-body politics face the challenge of transforming themselves into popular (voluntary) multiethnic countries. If 1989 was the year of miraculous ambiguity, of change bringing hope and anxiety, then 1990 (*anno fatalis?*) will be a decisive year in which last year's ambiguities will begin to be resolved and the presently uncertain futures of national minorities will fall into focus.

One thing is certain, however; more and more what seems the remote, the "dead" past will surface in the absence of pre-Gorbachev Soviet restraint. *Nationalities Papers* will continue to explore these "distant" times to help shed light on what transpires in the stormy present as a guide to the uncharted futures awaiting minorities in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union.